the
WIND
of
LIFE

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# THE WINE OF LIFE

## *BOOKS BY ARTHUR STRINGER*

THE SILVER POPPY

THE LOOM OF DESTINY

LONELY O'MALLEY

HEPHAESTUS AND OTHER POEMS

THE WIRE TAPPERS

THE WOMAN IN THE RAIN AND OTHER POEMS

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THE MAN WHO COULDN'T SLEEP

THE PRAIRIE WIFE

THE PRAIRIE MOTHER

# THE WINE OF LIFE

By ARTHUR STRINGER

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# THE WINE OF LIFE

## CHAPTER ONE

STORROW stared about the empty hotel-room, now denuded of its last appeasing touch of the personal. Then he crossed to the still open window.

As he stood there, vaguely oppressed by the thought of how life was for ever attaching itself to new soil and was for ever being torn up from that rootage, the sound of a hurdy-gurdy floated up through the hot August air. The notes, mellowed by a rampart of intervening roofs and further muffled by the distant drone of Broadway, insinuated themselves into the colouring of Storrow's mood and lent an overtone of wistfulness to his farewell survey of those faded walls cobwebbed with fire-escapes. His week of freedom in that shabby side-street hotel had not been an unhappy one. He had found nothing repugnant in its ugliness, in its gilded slatternliness, in its nocturnal pianos and its noisy house-dogs, in the kimonoed figures that fluttered about a hallway filled with the betraying odours of illicit cookery.

It had at least conferred on Storrow the gift of freedom. And freedom, he knew, was the one thing he would always demand of life. Elbow-room, he felt, must always be his, the right to come and go at his own sweet will, the right to idle or work, to rise or fall, to tool his own personal destinies upward or downward across the Great Divides of life as he chose. He remembered, as he stared idly down at a tarred and gravelled roof littered with orange-peel and empty bottles and cigarette ends, how the easy-going and slipshod atmosphere of this third-rate Tenderloin hotel had appealed to him. Its unruffled and urban self-concernment, its shoddy and casual

reticences, had provided him with the cover he craved, cover as screening as the hemlocked and the blue-valleyed solitudes that had once been his.

But now he had finished with it. Finished, too, he would be with his eager and unattached wanderings about the city, the city in undress because of its summer-end heat, the city undraped in its panting misery to his ever-questing eye. All the artist in him had joyed in the midnight parks crowded with sleepers, in the half-clad figures, the poses of utter abandon, the huddled and motionless groups making the greensward look so like a battlefield strewn with its dead. He had gloried in the accidental grouping of half-nude children about a water-hydrant. He had revelled in the Hogarthian intimate nudities of the tenement districts, in the occasional statuesque pose of an Italian girl asleep on the pavement of an open area-way, in the lassitude of a painted woman sitting under midnight trees, panting for breath, shadowed from the street-lamps by leaves so motionless they looked as though they had been stencilled out of sheets of brazen metal. He had loved to stare from the height of Murray Hill down the midnight quietness of Fifth Avenue, where the huge milky lamp-globes fell away in a double row, like twin ropes of pearls drooping from a languid woman's throat. He had gloried in gazing at the intermittent splash of the Madison Square fountain, throbbing and falling, throbbing and falling, as though it were the heart-beat of the tired city itself. He had liked that city in its hours of sleep, etherealized by moonlight, transformed by dusk and mystery into a tranquillized loveliness as alluring as a star-bathed Coliseum under its violet Italian skies. He had carried a sketching-block about with him, and had snatched at groupings and poses and taken notes and carried home pocketfuls of unco-ordinated and unassimilated impressions, gorging his soul on them, as voracious as a child let loose in a candy-shop. He was used to the wilderness, and had long since acquired the

lone-wolf habit of wandering about at his own free will, gathering up what lay in the path of his observation. And in this newer wilderness of stone and steel and brick, which could stand to the stranger in its midst even more desolate than the Barren Grounds themselves, Storrow rode the flying hooves of Curiosity and Caprice.

Those feverish flights had both humbled him and inspirited him. He had barked his shins on the discovery of how little he knew and how much there was to know. He had wakened to find himself only one of an army, a multitudinous and ever-elbowing army whose mere magnitude left him a little dizzy and homesick. New York, he found, was too intent on the pursuit of its own febrile ends to pay much attention to either him or his trunkful of clay-modellings so carefully wrapped in cheesecloth. But there was much to be seen and learned, and in that vigorous young body was repeated the ancient miracle of the nestling round-eyed confronting the universe, of youth peering hungrily across the first ramparts of the world.

Storrow, moist with the heat, pushed the window up as far as it would go. He leaned out across the dusty sill, staring more abstractedly than ever at the scabby and close-shouldered precipices of brick down which cascaded the countless fire-escapes of rusty iron. The metal trellis directly in front of him, smitten by the afternoon sun, made him think of a gridiron. It had been a scorcher, that day, one of the worst of the summer-end hot-spell which was leaving the city as wilted as a lettuce-leaf on a range-shelf. The sun that slanted over water-tanks and walls and roofs, Oriental in their huddling sky-line, threw creeping blue shadows across the narrow valley of light-wells and back areas twisting like a miniature Grand Canyon between the double row of apartment-hotels and rooming-houses that ran westward from Times Square towards the rattling Elevated of Sixth Avenue.

Storrow stared impersonally out at his vista of mottled walls and littered fire-escapes and asphalted back-yards. Through that echoing valley, by night, countless stray cats had the habit of reiterating their amorous miseries, mingled with the pulse of a three-piece Italian orchestra and the insistent nearby roar of Broadway. Yet both the sounds and the sights of that little valley had appealed to him, impregnating his new-found desolation with an interweaving tangle of intimacies, leaving his city a little more humanized, a little closer to him, like an overhaughty beauty accidentally seen in *déshabillé*.

Even the scene itself struck him as anything but ugly. He was still too much a new-comer on that triangulated island of unrest to find any corner of it without some touch of appeal. Over that welter of sun-baked roofs, indeed, hung a mist of pale gold, toning down to a thin wash of green in the softer shadows, deepening again to a valley-blue where the walls ended in the narrow areaways strung like musical instruments with their pulleyed clothes-lines. Above the eaves, on his right, towered the dormer-roof of a great hotel, pearled with its rows of electric-globes. Closer to him, obliquely across the canyon, stood a much humbler caravansary, plainly a theatrical apartment-hotel like his own. He had always thought of the people in that hotel as cliff-dwellers, with the sills of their narrow windows crowded by countless betrayals of extremely frugal house-keeping, half-emptied milk-bottles, biscuit-cartons, paper-covered marmalade-jars, an apple or two beside the vivid yellow of oranges, an occasional row of beer-bottles, a container of sliced bacon cheek by jowl with a seltzer-siphon. In the wider windows, opening on sleeping-rooms, he had often caught sight of freshly washed underclothing, thin stockings and swaying lingerie hanging a little forlornly in that none too virgin air. Yet even in those humdrum drying garments Storrow had always found a wayward and wordless appeal. He tried to tell himself that it was because their

whites and pinks, their suggestive lacy softnesses, provided a needed touch of human warmth, of conciliating frailnesses, to the urban and indurated hardness of line all about him. They were like bird-feathers, he felt, found in a coign along cliffs of granite.

Then Storrow's gaze, as he leaned further out the window in quest of these ever-ameliorating intimacies of life, fell on a figure which had hitherto escaped him. It was that of a girl in an open window almost directly below his own. She sat motionless on the wide sill, across which a newspaper had been spread. Her feet were crossed tailor-fashion and rested on the rusty iron slats of the fire-escape in front of her, where an open book lay face down. Beside her, on the newspaper, reposed a little scattering of metal hair-pins, and in one hand, now resting idly on her knee, she held a heavy white comb. So motionless did she sit, in fact, that her posture quickly brought to Storrow's mind the suggestion of a sun-worshipper.

Yet he knew, the next moment, that she had merely been drying her hair. He could, in fact, plainly discern a cluster of hair-pins still held between her lips. He noticed, as she tossed the loose torrent of hair back from her face, that her arms and shoulders were quite bare, her skin standing out a milk-weed white against that waving curtain of gloom. For this hair, Storrow noticed, was extremely thick and heavy, a dull mahogany-brown in tone. Yet it was quite without wave, as uncompromisingly straight as an Indian's, less suggestive of beauty, in its thick-flowing mass, than of strength.

Storrow realized, as he watched her, that she in turn was intent on watching something at the back of the eating-house where the Italian orchestra played by night. Following the direction of her gaze, he caught sight of a lean and hungry cat reaching up to a window-sill on which rested a pan of freshly-boiled lobsters, as red as a cardinal's cap. That odorous wealth, however, seemed just beyond the reach of the hungry animal, which

stretched and clawed and complained thinly as it continued its ineffectual efforts to reach the pan.

It was a trivial enough incident, yet it made a picture which in some way became memorable to Storrow, a lean and padded Hunger writhing and pawing and whining for that savoury meal, as rich in aroma as it was in colour, just beyond its reach. It seemed Desire made manifest, uncontrolled and torturing appetite typified by an eager and lean-ribbed body quivering with its self-immuring ache for the unattainable. It made him think of his long-treasured print of Rodin's *La Porte de l'Enfer,* of the great door about which writhed and coiled and reached the tormented creatures of desire, fevering for that which they were denied, fighting, unsatisfied, for that which was for ever beyond their hands.

Yet the next moment Storrow was thinking about neither the Rodin frieze nor the drab-coloured street-cat and its cardinal-red shell-fish, for his gaze had wandered back to the girl in the window so much closer to him. She had thrown back her loose hair, with a circular back-toss of her head, and with slow and meditative fingers was now coiling that heavy mane together. She seemed, in fact, still to be watching the cat and the lobster-pan as she abstractedly took hair-pin after hair-pin from her compressed lips. Her face was quite uncovered by this time, though it was not her face which Storrow first studied. What first impressed him were the stockingless feet resting on the fire-escape rods. These feet were thrust into faded red Turkish slippers, which drooped from the toes, leaving bare the line of the heel, as clear-cut as the heel of a razor. Then, as she swayed forward in her meditative up-coiling of that heavy rope of hair, he noticed the thickness of the milky-white shoulders, which seemed heavy for a body carrying so distinct a note of slenderness. This impression of plastic solidity was repeated in the leaning torso itself, so maturely thick from the full shoulder-blade to the flat firm breast. He knew

enough of anatomy to accept this as an announcement of physical vigour, as a symbol of bodily strength which he found repeated in the round unmuscled arms, in the full column of the throat, in the calisthenic line of the hips which even the girl's squatting position failed to foreshorten into heaviness. That body, in fact, made him think of a young colt's, though he was not sure whether this arose from its hint of undisciplined vitality or from something animal-like in the girl's serene unconcern as to even that partial nudity.

This absence of sex consciousness, in fact, took Storrow's gaze back to her face. It was, in many ways, a remarkable face, though he could not see it as distinctly as he wished. His first impression of it was one of careless vitality, of over-abundant and as yet unco-ordinated ardour. But the next moment this was contradicted by a subsidiary and more persistent impression of lassitude, of something that seemed to approach languid and sophisticated self-concernment. He was anxious to see her eyes, as though by them to contradict or confirm this impression. But they were hooded in shadow by the heavy brows, and all he could be sure of was that they were wide apart, so wide apart, indeed, that they carried to his mind a vague hint of Egyptian sarcophagal drawings. In colour, he conjectured, those eyes would be dark, as dark as the loosely coiled hair with which the slow white hands were crowning the over-weighted head. Her mouth, he could see, was undoubtedly large, and of a vivid red, a red that gave buoyancy to a jaw already too heavy in its width of line, accentuating some wordless suggestion of Orientalism in her character, an Orientalism which the lucid and wide-set eyes seemed always to contradict. The nose was short and straight, too thin-bridged to seem repellently sensual yet with a faint out-flare of the nostrils which might in part have accounted for his earlier impression of wild-animal eagerness. And if the eye-brows were heavy they at least gave an air of thought to a face

not otherwise intellectual, an air of child-like and wistful broodingness.

Why it impressed him as a face of depth Storrow could not tell. That impression, he felt, might be based on its very contradictions, for his final estimate of her became one of loose-jointed compactness, of vigour in lassitude, of strength in slenderness. But the woman, like the face, was a challenge to him. In each seemed to lurk the perilous note of intimacy, the promise of mystery, the arresting air of a barricaded citadel which could be carried only by storm and violence. And yet he was staring at a girl, he remembered, who was shameless enough to sit half-dressed on the window-sill of a Rialto hotel and dangle her heels on a dirty fire-escape.

What prompted that sudden revulsion of feeling Storrow could never quite understand. But his interest in the half-draped figure, for all its pictorial values, seemed to seep away. His eyes had exhausted her, like a landscape too minutely over-looked. She became merely a lazy-bodied young animal sunning herself on the edge of an unkempt rooming-house fire-escape. There would be much that was sordid about her, he remembered, just as the atmosphere in which she existed was sordid. Proof of this all-pervading sordidness, in fact, came up to him even as he stared down into the unclean area below. He could hear the sound of wrangling voices from the basement doorway of the very building in which he stood, a wordy warfare which was not altogether unfamiliar to him.

He knew, even before that fiercely quarrelling couple came out into the open, that it was Michael Mullaly, the blowsy engineer of that ill-kept apartment-hotel, once more fighting with his wife. In this case, however, their quarrel soon gave every evidence of developing into something more than the customary exchange of unclean language. It was already more than a mere clash of words, for Mullaly, obviously depressed by that unmitigated heat

of a New York midsummer afternoon, had sought a short-cut to oblivion by mingling cooling draughts of bottled beer with the firier assuagement of fusel-oil whiskey. Whereupon, it was equally plain, he was exercising the ancient and established prerogative of using his fists upon the features of his protesting helpmate, who, Storrow noticed, was not taking this punishment without some slight reciprocation of force.

Yet that combat now seemed something very remote from Storrow. He had seen too much of life in the wilds to be particularly moved by conflict as mere conflict. The city, too, had already touched him with some shadow of its self-immurement. It had sufficiently impressed him with its first social lesson of remembering to mind his own business. And the last light-shaft of the coppery afternoon sun was slanting like a mellowed calcium-flare across the fire-escape platform on which the bare-shouldered girl was now standing, enriching both drapery and milky-skinned figure with new and arresting shadows, picking her out line by line as she stood there in her careless and preoccupied pose until she seemed plastic, statuesque, as marble-like as a Caryatid leaning from a temple-wall. Again the pendulum-swing of emotion carried his interest back to a subject which he had only thought to be exhausted, though it piqued him a little that this alert figure so near him could remain so unconscious of his presence there above her.

The combat in the area, however, was already becoming more Homeric, more explosive in movement. Storrow could see the girl on the fire-escape lean further out over the rusty iron-railing, and for the second time he let his eyes follow her line of vision. He could see the big-limbed engineer, in short-sleeved undershirt and soiled denim jumper, strike viciously at the upturned face of his mate. Yet even then the persistent artistic impulse of the studious-eyed youth prompted him to take impersonal note of the brawny chest and the huge-muscled biceps, for

Mullaly in his younger day had toiled long and arduously as a Pittsburgh steel-puddler and his strength was still that of an Antæus. If he seemed intent on exercising what remained of this strength on the less sinewy sharer of his joys and sorrows, that ragged-waisted fury, still fighting like a cat, stood able to prevent the conflict from being an altogether one-sided matter. She continued to dispute his mastery, by tongue and nail and tooth, until Mullaly managed to draw back his great fist and bring it flat down on the face of the woman clawing and clinging to him.

"You *brute!*" gasped out the bare-shouldered girl from the fire-escape.

That expletive seemed to awaken in Storrow his first active interest in the combat below. If it awakened in him a corresponding impulse towards interference, the impulse was not an overmastering one. And again Mullaly's well-placed fist fell on the upturned face so close to his shoulder.

"Oh, you beast!" the girl called shudderingly down into that echoing well of shadow. And that shrill challenge both arrested and nettled the sottish man now sure of his victory. He lifted his head, like a wounded moose, and stared drunkenly upward.

"So it's yuh, yuh ——!" he trumpeted defiantly up out of those echoing depths. And having delivered himself of that ultimate epithet, absolute in its finality, unsurpassable in its contempt, he went on with the task more immediately before him.

Storrow heard that foul word, that impossible word, just as he had heard the throaty soprano of the high-pitched voice which even shrillness failed to rob of its richness. He could also catch the quick wince of the girl's stooping body, as though a lash had fallen across her bare shoulders.

He was never quite sure in his own mind as to which it was that fired the train. But through his body went

the feral flash, like a splutter of fireworks. He tingled and burned with a sudden righteous indignation, with a quick rage that sent him vaulting through the open window to the fire-escape platform in front of him as unthinkingly as though the room-floor beneath him had risen and projected him upward and outward. He heard the girl's gasp of astonished fright as he went scrambling down the iron ladder and swept past her timorously withdrawn body. But he went nimbly on, with the anger of a Galahad singing in his ears. It had occurred to him, by this time, that it was a terrible and unforgiveable thing to strike a woman. And as he dropped as lightly as a cougar from the lowermost iron platform to the asphalted area-floor, close beside the astounded and somewhat breathless Irishman, he was as drunk, in his own way, as that denim-clad engineer confronting him. But it was not on fusel-oil whiskey.

Yet befuddled as that lordly Hibernian may have been, he understood clearly enough what interference at any such moment implied. And there was neither concern nor hesitation in his movements as he swung about and squared for action. In his day Michael Mullaly had met and worsted too many burly iron-workers to be intimidated by a youth who failed even to observe the ancient ceremonial of removing his coat before venturing into battle. Imperiously and impersonally he flung his battered help-mate to one side, intent on disposing of this trouble-maker who had dared to interfere with an honest man in his honest diversions.

Nor was there any trace of hesitation, on the other hand, in Owen Storrow's movements. He was smaller than the bare-armed Hercules in the denim jumper, but his four months of North Woods life had left him trained to the bone. Life in the open, all that spring and summer, had crowned his weeks of hardship with endurance and self-confidence and the quick-footed resourcefulness of a cat. More than once, too, he had stood up before

men quite as burly as Mullaly and had been able to hold his own. Yet behind that hard-won self-assurance was the fire of the Crusader, the will of the righter of wrongs, the *morale* of the lover of decency outraged beyond endurance.

This impression of knightly enterprise was intensified, to Storrow, by the memory of the girl watching him from her open window. It swayed him with a determination to have the affair a clear-cut one, as brief and decisive as it was dramatic. But the vast majority of fights in real life, unfortunately, are not of this nature. It is something peculiar to the pages of romance, that quickly and carefully delivered blow of the clenched fist which sends Evil sprawling ignominiously earthward. And Storrow soon awakened to the disconcerting fact that the present combat was not destined to be of that engagingly romantic disposition. There was no prompt knock-out, no cool and lightning-like *coup de grâce*. For Mullaly, in the first place, was an opponent of unexpected solidity, a hulk of quite amazing hardness. And the human fist, no matter what the will behind it, is an instrument of qualified efficiency when it comes to a matter of pile-driving repentance into corporeal grossness. Flexors and phalanges, when in too violent collision with bone and sinew, cannot hope to survive such actions without injury. And fighting with sore knuckles is altogether as uninviting as walking with sore feet. Then, too, the singing fires of fusel-oil whiskey coursing through Mullaly's big veins left him disturbingly impervious to any pains attendant upon well-clumped jaw-bone and hard-pounded cheek-flap. Muddled as his slow Celtic mind may have been, the moves and tricks and resources of a life-time of combat did not altogether desert him. So when he fought he was able to do so with a stubborn and groggy science by no means contemptible.

The situation, in fact, began to worry Storrow not a little, clearly as right was on his side and repeatedly as he

was able to plant his blows on the hide of that thick-muscled opponent. Intelligence was with him, as was also alertness and the resiliency of youth. Yet the implacable laws of Chance ordained that at least an occasional blow from that ponderous Celtic fist should reach home, however parried by guard-arm or rendered oblique by side-stepping. Storrow could taste the salt of sweat on his dripping face. He could also see blood dripping from a cut on his lip, and the numb pain in his bruised and battered knuckles became something to be no longer overlooked. He remembered, through a mist of fatigue, that he was not cutting the heroic figure he had expected. He realized there was a definite limit to the period which all such things could be endured. What was worse, he awakened to the fact that there were more faces than one now watching him and his ignominious efforts, fixed and impassive faces in window after window above him. And with a grip of the jaw he took himself in hand and began to fight as he had never fought before.

Storrow startled his enemy by no longer giving ground before superior weight. Even when forced to his knees, he ducked, clenched, and in some way struggled again to his feet. Yet if he fought fiercely, he also fought deliberately. He knew now that there must be no waste of energy. He worried over his finger-bones, oppressed by a foolish fear that he might break one of these and find himself with a useless hand. Skinned and burning as his knuckles had become, from impact against that obdurate hulk on which they so repeatedly thumped and thudded, he remembered they were all he had to depend upon, that they must do their work more adroitly, choose their target more expertly.

The result of this access to science, of this *coup d'état* of Reason against Passion, was a slight but a distinctly perceptible change in the tide of conflict. A look of bewilderment came into Mullaly's set face. A vague uncertainty began to mark his movements. He shambled and

shuffled and circled about his narrow field of asphalt with increasing evidences of distress. Storrow made note of that indecision in the timing and placing of counter-strokes, that telltale proneness to fan the air. And his dragging spirits raised, revived, and expressed themselves in a sudden vicious onslaught which brought a futile gasp of protest from the sweat-drenched Irish face. Mullaly was bleeding by this time, bleeding profusely and pictorially, streaking a sleeveless undershirt already wet to the waist as his huge paws flailed the air and fell so distressingly on emptiness.

So wavering were his uncontrolled stumbles about that dusty arena, in fact, that Storrow could already coolly foresee the end. He was even able to deliberate, with one half of his still busy brain, which hand it would be better to use for that final blow, that ultimate knock-out which was surely going to be hard on the already overbruised phalanges. Anxious as he was for that end, he schooled himself into a sort of second wind of deliberateness. He remembered the bare-shouldered girl in the window above him. He desired above everything that she should witness that final effort and appreciate its effect. So he withheld the end, mercilessly, manœuvring guardedly for position and grouping, even while he inwardly cogitated just where the blow should be placed.

The chance for that blow was finally before him, and the struggles of an overheated and ridiculously dishevelled young Galahad would surely have been crowned with triumph, had not Fate, in the form of Michael Mullaly's better-half, seen fit to take a hand in that contest. The blood that flowed so freely from his hide, apparently, had washed away from his mate the last of her enmity. Mere personal issues vanished into thin air before the more momentous indignities being inflicted upon her lord and master. And disgrace, eternal and indisputable disgrace, was about to be heaped upon the name of Mullaly.

So quite unnoticed by the preoccupied combatants shuffling and grasping about that highwalled back-yard, she vanished through her basement door and sought possession of that same coal-shovel with which Michael had so recently demonstrated his strength on her own indignant person. Slipping back to the field of conflict, she approached the still preoccupied Storrow, with this shovel poised above her head. She did not deliberate, because there was no need for deliberation. She saw her chance, and she seized it. With a strength born of righteous indignation she brought the broadside of that heavy shovel down on the head of the youth who had so lightly insinuated his person into the intimacies of family relationships.

If it was an unmeditated blow, it was also a workmanlike and well-placed one. It brought a world, covered with asphalt, slapping up against Storrow's startled face. It did not leave him altogether unconscious, but it left him stunned, and limp, like a wet feather-pillow. It left him with a child-like craving to rest there, prone on his back, until a much-misbehaving universe could again swing back into balance. It also left him with an altogether new-born indifference as to that enemy on whom his interest had been so actively and so recently centred. Storrow preferred resting there, on the comfortable asphalt, until that momentary daze had deserted him.

When he opened his eyes and Intelligence once more remounted her outraged throne neither Michael Mullaly nor his spouse was within hailing distance. They had triumphantly yet discreetly withdrawn, vanishing into home ports for repairs. But Storrow, as he lay there blinking ruefully upward, found no such harbourage at hand. He found himself stretched out, indeed, very much like a Dying Gladiator, the centre of a small but an extremely deep-sided amphitheatre of spectators. From the serried windows on each side of that narrow area faces stared down at him, grinning faces, vaguely commiserative

faces, indifferent faces. They brought home to him the bitter memory of his undoing. He had gone down ignominiously, unheroically, at the hand of a woman. And at that very moment other women were contemplating his helplessness, his humiliation, his posture of self-acknowledged defeat.

The sting of that brought Storrow back to his senses. He scrambled to his feet and spat the blood from his mouth. Then, still a little dizzy, he staggered towards the only cover that presented itself. This, oddly enough, happened to be the basement-door which opened into the domain of Michael Mullaly himself. But Storrow, with his head still throbbing, was indifferent to all such details. The one thing he demanded was seclusion. He ached for the quiet and peace of his private and personal quarters, just as the sorely hurt grizzly aches for his lair and the wounded lion for his cave. He wanted solitude and the balm of Time on his bruises. For his lip was cut and bleeding, his head was a ball of pulsing fire, and about his body were many spots extremely sensitive to the touch. Yet he dreaded the thought of public parade up through that peering-eyed hotel, for his habitually fastidious person was bedraggled with gore and stained with mingled dust and sweat. It would involve explanations, and embarrassments, and lead in all probability to still deeper complications. Then he remembered, after groping his way past the boiler-room, that the elevator-shaft extended clear to the basement where he stood, and this, with the help of a tip to its operator, implied the chance of being carried direct to his floor. He had already pushed the bell-button beside the iron-grilled door when he chanced to catch sight of the narrow stairway winding upward, like a May-pole ribbon, about the shaft. He was, in fact, speculating on which of these two possible routes to follow when all thought on the matter was cut short by the reappearance of Michael Mullaly.

Michael, fortified by two pints of beer and the first-aid

ministrations of his spouse, beheld that battered invader of his own private premises and advanced upon him without scruple and without hesitation. He had by this time recovered his wind and his earlier fixed pride in his prowess. And this time he proposed to reap a victory in no way qualified by the taint of petticoated interference.

Storrow watched that advance, watched it out of a studious and burning eye. He watched it with resentment, with a hot wave of protest at the injustices that were being so repeatedly heaped upon him. And when Mullaly came for him in what was to be one final taurine and obliterating rush, Storrow, with his back against the grill, remembered his own battered knuckles and wondered just how much he could depend upon them. It would not last long, he knew. He was already too dizzy to endure many moments of punishment and too unsteady on his pins for that quick duck and side-step which so often eluded punishment.

He gaped at the great hulk confronting him, foreseeing in his mind's eye that infuriated mass kicking at his fallen body. His gaze wandered aimlessly over the wet and blood-streaked undershirt. He discerned a vague triangular depression between the tips of the floating-ribs and the wet leather belt. And that discovery brought him hope. He saw, with a flash of joy, that Mullaly's fists were poised high, forgetful of the sympathetic ganglia with radiating nerve-fibers which couched in that three-sided depression, as sensitive to shock as a Sèvres vase in a wall-niche. But he remembered, with even greater joy, that this vulnerable plexus lay behind a soft layer of flesh, that impact against it implied no vast injury to his already tortured finger-joints. So he parried and feinted to make sure of his opening — for he knew in his desperation there would be only one opening. Then he let his clenched right jab out with a piston-stroke, as quick and explosive as the back-fire of an engine.

The blow fell against the taut belly-skin, fell as clean

as a wheel-tapper's hammer against its polished rim. The solar-plexus, receiving that full stroke as a percussion-cap receives its trigger-blow, communicated its explosion of sudden pain to the entire body behind it, and that body went down with a *blat* like a stunned steer's.

It was a knock-out, a knock-out as clear-cut and decisive as the overthrow of a nine-pin. In the murky shadows of a cellar, with no eyes to behold it, with no audience to applaud it, Storrow belatedly redeemed himself to his own soul. There, in one unwitnessed yet spectacular blow, he achieved his triumph, worsted his oppressor, and sent Evil incarnate to earth.

## CHAPTER TWO

THAT fallen oppressor, Storrow remembered, could lay claim to a helpmate who was both active and irruptive. And he had no wish to remain there and haggle over the fruits of victory. He nursed no desire to face the complications attendant upon the interference of the softer sex. He opened the little fire-proofed door on his right and started up the metal-paved stairway that took him circling round and round the elevator-shaft until his head was dizzier than ever and his heart was pounding like a trip-hammer. He had intended to count the floors as he went. In fact, he did count them. But that reckoning could not have been as accurate as he had imagined, for when he reached what he felt sure was his own landing and had groped down the burlap-covered hall to the rear, he found the door that should have been his own hospitable door firmly locked in his face. This, naturally, both bewildered and angered him. He shook and tugged at that door, panting, feeling that he would give all he owned for one deep and cooling drink of water, oppressed by the leaden thought that the world at large had in some way turned against him.

He was still tugging and straining at the unyielding brass knob when the companion door on his left was thrown open. He neither turned nor looked up, at that movement in his immediate neighbourhood, since his one wish, at the moment, was for seclusion. Yet he was not unconscious of the fact that from the oblong of light framed by the open door he was being quietly and studiously inspected.

"What's the matter?" asked a remarkably composed and matter-of-fact voice out of the prolonged silence.

Storrow turned slowly about. He saw a woman in white, with bare arms and shoulders that shone satin-like in the strong side-light. He stared at her vacantly, for the floor beneath him was now wavering like rails on a sun-steeped road-bed. It was several seconds before he fully awakened to the fact that it was the same girl who had sat in the open window drying her hair.

"Nothing," was his none too gracious response, remembering that he had had quite enough of women for one day. Yet his aspect in general as he put out a hand to steady himself against the door-frame caused the girl's brows to come together in a slight frown of apprehension.

"What's the matter?" she repeated, stepping closer to him.

"I want to get into my room," he protested, shaken with the humiliation of lusty strength compelled to acknowledge its weakness.

"This isn't your room," she explained. "Yours must be on the floor above."

She was still inspecting him, with indecision in her studious eyes, when a door towards the front of the narrow hallway opened and the sound of voices came to them. She noticed the tendency of that limp and woe-begone figure to shrink back into the shadow. She seemed to understand his predicament.

"You can go up by the fire-escape," she explained as she piloted him in through the open door and swung it shut with her heel. Then she turned and stared at him, in the full light from the still open window. His appearance seemed to frighten her.

"You *are* hurt!" she gasped in a throaty and impersonal coo of surprise. It meant no more than her hand-clasp on his arm. "You're simply *covered* with blood!"

He put a hand up to his lip. It was sore and swollen, and bleeding slowly, stubbornly, oozing drop by drop.

"It's not *that!*" he tried to explain.

"What is it?" she asked.

Instead of answering her he lifted a hand to his still throbbing head. It seemed too big for his body, too heavy to hold up.

"Yes, I saw it," she said with a gesture more of comprehension than of indignation.

"It makes me a little dizzy — the same as when you're sea-sick — when you want to get flat on your back," he explained, oppressed by the meagreness of the sympathy in her studious and abstracted eyes. Then he remembered that he was very thirsty. He looked anxiously about to see if there was any water in sight.

The girl at his side misread that movement.

"You're not going to faint, are you?" she asked with a sudden quaver in her voice. And without even waiting for his answer she slipped her bare arm about his waist, as though determined to hold him up. She scarcely came to his shoulder, he noticed. But she guided him, very much as a nurse guides a child, across the room to a wide couch-bed covered with an imitation Turkish tapestry. She slipped a hand under his shoulder, arching back her body to sustain his weight as he went down.

He had no intention of fainting. But he was glad enough to close his eyes for a minute or two as his head sank back on a thick sofa-pillow which smelt slightly of house-dust. He could feel her breath fanning his neck. She was actually unknotting his scarf and unbuttoning his wilted and sodden collar.

"Could you give me a drink of water?" he asked, remembering the fire-escape and the fact that it led to his own room. And it was solitude, he also remembered, that he had been in search of.

She left him, and slipped across the room, with her loose slipper-heels clacking after her. Storrow could hear the hiss of tap-water through the bath-room

door, and the not unpleasant clack of the returning slipper-heels. He raised himself on his elbow and took the glass from her hand. The water it held was tepid and flat-tasting. But he drank it to the last drop.

He felt better, after that, though the act of swallowing reminded him of his hurt lip, painful against the glass-edge. And that, in turn, made him think of his head, which still throbbed. So with a cautious forefinger he explored along the side of his skull, where the coal-shovel had raised a lump like a poached egg. He was staring somewhat ruefully at his bruised and tender knuckles when the girl came back from the bathroom with a bowl of hot water and a moistened towel in her hand.

"Hold still a moment," she quietly commanded. She was stooping over him, the next moment, carefully wiping the dust-stained and blood-smeared face.

It struck Storrow as being slightly ridiculous, but he submitted, with his eyes closed. It was not until she transferred her ministrations to his bruised finger-joints that he opened his eyes, watching her abstractedly as she just as abstractedly went on with her work.

It occurred to him, for the first time, that it was distinctly pleasureable, having a quiet-eyed and soft-handed woman bathing his blood-clotted knuckles. She was the first white woman, he remembered, that he had talked to in any way intimately during the past eighteen long weeks. Over four months in the open, with nothing but squaws and slatternly frontier breeds before his eyes, had left him with a vague hunger for womanly beauty which his impersonal wanderings about a new and unknown city had done little to appease. It was a hunger which tended to throw romance about the rustle of a skirt, wayward and dusky loveliness into the accidental shadows of a hair-coil. It was a hunger which prompted him, momentarily unmindful of bruised body and soul alike, to lift his eyes and study the face bending so close over his own.

His eye for form was quick and true, though his colour-sense, on the other hand, was subsidiary and sometimes even defective. The first thing he noticed was her hair, which seemed over-heavy for the head it crowned. It was neither fine nor coarse, and was remarkable primarily for its mass. Equally heavy were the black fringes of the thickly planted lashes, which made the abstracted grey-green eyes darker-looking than they really were. In the meditative outlook of these eyes was a sense of woodland coolnesses, contradicted in turn by the adorable outline of the straight short nose and the over-full upper lip which left a somewhat incongruous impression of child-like poutiness upon her face. The lips themselves were so fullblooded that Storrow with his uncertain eye for colour might have called them a watermelon-red, a red that would have been over-vivid except for the perpetual sense of moisture about their heavy curves. There was a touch of softness about the yielding oval of the chin which so strangely opposed the coolness of the wide brow and the habitual air of meditation marking the upper part of the face. The drooping mass of the Indian-like hair, he noticed, left the column of her neck almost marble-like in the modified room-light. His eye, trained in the study of form and line to its minutest particularity, made note of the fact that there were no veins showing in the flesh of her arms and shoulders, where the blood-vessels seemed as deep-seated as though covered by the finest of pebbled kid. On one shoulder, just below the collar-bone, he noticed a scar, and wondered what could have caused it. Yet for the second time he was impressed by the compactness of the thick though far from ponderous body, a sense of solidity which made him think of marble. He tried to tell himself that this was due to the milk-like texture of the skin, from which the customary blue pencillings of the veins were absent. Then, as she raised one arm to push back her hair, the suggestion of statuary was heightened by

the discovery that the arm-pit was without hair, as smooth as a child's. This puzzled him even more than the scar on the milk-white shoulder, abashing him by a quick consciousness of nudity which he found it hard to explain. And as she looked up, awakening to the fact of his scrutiny, he barricaded himself, as it were, behind his quickly shut eyes.

"Is that better?" she asked as she sat back with a sigh and wiped a fine dewing of moisture from her temples. Storrow, opening his eyes to this movement, remembered that it was an oppressively hot day. And the sun, he could see through the open window, was already well down beyond the house-tops.

Then his eyes followed the girl as she crossed to her dressing-table. On this table he could see toilet-articles of cut-glass and silver, an alcohol-lamp, a pair of electric curling-irons, a folding leather travelling clock. She picked up a tiny porcelain jar and returned to his side. The next moment the cool tip of her finger was smearing some sort of ointment on his battered lip.

"Does it hurt?" she abstractedly asked. He shook his head in negation, submitting solemnly, almost contentedly, to the tempered pressure. Her stooping figure, in that paling and mildly diffused light, merged into a soft and shadowy mysteriousness which translated each tone and accident of modelling into something momentous. It struck him as odd that he had been so slow to discover the sheer physical appeal of that figure, since the discovery of such things was supposed to be his first business in life. She too was examining his face with a new and less impersonal interest.

"How did you ever get so sunburned?" she asked as she stared down at his uncovered neck.

"In the North Woods," he told her.

"The North Woods?" she repeated, plainly not understanding what he meant.

"I've been up north of Abbitibi studying my subjects," he explained.

"Studying your subjects?" she echoed, still at sea.

"Studying wild-life — animals and Indians and that sort of thing."

"Do you mean you're an artist?"

He shook his head. "I'm only trying to be one. I've been modelling in clay a little."

"You mean you're a sculptor?" she asked, wondering why he should seem so reluctant to acknowledge it.

Again he shook his head. "I want to learn to be one," he told her. "I've only been — been in New York for about a week."

She sat back, with her heavy brows slightly knitted, studying his face.

"What makes you want to do that sort of thing?" she finally inquired.

"It's what I've been doing for over two years," he found the courage to acknowledge. It even took an effort to keep from adding that his *Chippewa Chief,* recast in bronze, stood against the north wall of the Château Laurier rotunda in Ottawa and that his *Wounded Moose* held a place of qualified honour in Toronto's public library. But he nursed the modest man's aversion to explaining himself. He was thinking, at the moment, how panther-like were the movements of her body, with all that smooth heaviness about its slenderness, that persistent, almost feline muscular sturdiness masked by its flowing grace of line.

"But how can you make statues of wild animals here in New York?" she meditatively inquired. She was sitting on the edge of the couch now, as unconscious of self as though she were talking from a car-seat.

"I didn't come for that," he explained. "I came down here to study. I've an order for a statue of Tecumseh, from a Western Ontario park-committee. It's to be in

bronze, life size. But I've never done anything like that, and Arthur Loring, the animal artist I worked with all last winter in Toronto, couldn't help me out. He advised me to come to New York, even though I had to begin at the Art League and work up, until I saw the chance to get in with one of the bigger men — with Brainard or Modrynski, if I could."

She was the first woman, in that city of multitudinous unknown faces, who had betrayed the slightest interest in him or his existence, though she was less impressed by his explanations of himself than he had expected. It even startled him a little when she repeated the name "Modrynski" in a tone of quiet contempt.

"*You* know him?" asked Storrow.

"I know what he *is*," retorted the girl with a slight upward thrust of one bare shoulder. Then, to his disappointment, she veered away from the subject, as though it were an issue distasteful to her. "But I can't imagine you ever settling down into one of those studio-rats," she averred, once more studying him with her abstracted eyes.

"Why not?" he demanded, with a quick touch of resentment.

Instead of answering him she continued to gaze down at him with that mild and meditative stare, as intimate and explorative as through window-glass. What she saw was a large-boned youth with coppery-brown hair, clipped close, yet not short enough to conceal the crisp kink in its fibre. She saw a man, still young, who looked very much as an intellectualized lumber-jack might have looked, with a skin burned brown by sun and wind, with a thick neck, thick-shouldered body, lean jaw, square teeth as white as a hound's, and a slightly rebellious mouth made more so by the heaviness of its cut and swollen lip. The hands were not an artist's hands, but were wide and muscular, brown as a Mexican's, with heavy-sinewed fingers. It was only the eyes and the

upper part of the face, she saw, that tended to reclaim the figure from the merely physical. For the eyes, with their irises of Prussian blue, were as soft as a woman's yet redeemed from effeminacy by an expression of unsatisfied hunger which apparently she found it no easy matter to decipher. Certain bony convolutions of the temples, too, gave him an air of Hamlet-like meditativeness, of aloofness from the merely physical, of speculative other-worldliness which the eager light in the Prussian blue eyes was apt to translate into wistfulness. Yet her final impression of him, oddly enough, was not mental but physical, an impression of hard muscles and clean-cut lines and as yet unexhausted animal spirits, with a purely animal pensiveness in their moments of idleness. But most of all she was struck by the vague untamed eagerness of the man, an eagerness which seemed always absent from the men of the city as she had encountered them. He was something as new to her as one of his wild animals out of the woods might have been.

Yet whatever appeal he may have held for her, he at the same time held that which was subliminally disturbing. She turned away from him and picked up a slipper that had dropped from her bare heel. Then abstractedly crossing the room and taking a pair of silk stockings from her trunk-top, she sat down on a chair and began pulling them on. There seemed something dismissive in the movement, something which brought the man on the couch to his feet.

"I guess," he said awkwardly, sharing her sudden emergence from the impersonal, "I guess I'd better be getting up that fire-escape."

Yet he hesitated, at a loss as to how he should phrase his parting message. He was thinking, in fact, of the sexlessness of her actions as she leaned forward there in her boyish and abandoned pose, silently pulling on the stockings of thin silk. He stood still watching her as

she stamped and shook down her white skirt with a strangely doe-like movement. He wondered what lay behind that divorce from sex-consciousness, asking himself if it was mere unconcern, or due to some indurating discipline that had stripped life of both its falseness and its fineness. She detected that meditative look in his eye and her forehead was tinged by a faint wave of colouring which he found it hard to account for.

"You're blaming me for all this," she began, and then broke off.

"No, I ought to thank you for it," he said with more warmth than he had intended.

Her answer, whatever it might have been, was cut short by the sound of a knock on the door behind them. Their eyes met.

He seemed to understand her silent message. He climbed, a little stiff and heavy, out on the fire-escape landing. Then he went slowly up the rusty iron steps until he came to his own open window.

Before that open window he stopped short. For in the familiar-looking room, the room which he still regarded as his, he beheld a strange figure, as unexpected as it was arresting. It was the figure of a stout but extremely tired-looking woman engaged in the act of drawing on a negligee.

He stared, slightly incredulous, at the faded walls and the worn drab rug, the authenticating broken rocker, the only too well-remembered bed of corroded brass rods, on which a hat and an open travelling bag now reposed.

Then the truth of the situation seeped through to his brain. A new guest had already been assigned to the room, to the room from which his own belongings had so recently been sent. And the moist and determined jaw of that weary-eyed guest made it easy for him to dramatize uncomfortable contingencies which might arise from her discovery of him at that open window. So he drew back, started down the rusty iron steps again,

and then came to a stop. He remembered the knock on the door, and for the second time was able to dramatize contingencies that were anything but palatable.

Yet it was necessary to choose one of those two avenues of escape, and he preferred the lower one. His approach to the window beneath him, however, was as guarded as he was able to make it. But still again he was arrested, this time by the sound of a quick and angry voice.

"So long as I pay for this room, it's mine," he heard the girl call out in incredibly hardened tones, "and I'll do what I like in it!"

The reply to that challenge was so low that Storrow failed to catch it. All he knew was that it was a man speaking, a man who was angry but still in control of himself.

"You *dare* to carry any tale like that down to the office!" the flattened girlish voice once more flung out. "Just *try* it!"

"I suppose that's why you hang out in a dump like this," the man's tremulous voice retorted.

"It's none of your business where I hang out," was the counter-retort. "And the sooner you get out of this room the better it'll suit me!"

Storrow judged, by the sound of her receding voice, that the girl was crossing to the door and opening it.

"You know what you'll pay for this, Torrie?" challenged the deeper voice, still shaking a little, shot through with a feeling that seemed deeper than anger.

"That's my own affair!"

The other's reply to this did not reach Storrow's ear.

"I don't care what you do with your part, or your production, or your own oily carcase. I'm sick of the whole combination! I'm through! Isn't that plain enough for you to understand? I'm *through!*"

This was followed by a moment of unbroken silence. Then came the sound of a step crossing the floor, suc-

ceeded by the pregnantly thunderous slam of a door in the hot evening air.

Storrow, in the ensuing silence, moved slowly back from the open window. He stood on the iron grating, uncertain what to do, reluctant to re-enter that arena of noisy combat. He was still there, debating the uninviting alternative of running the blockade of the serried windows that stood between him and the basement area, when the discoloured lace curtain was pushed aside and the girl's face suddenly appeared, within three feet of his own. She was obviously startled to find him there, but that minor bewilderment was soon immersed in the bigger waves of anger still surging through her.

"You heard *that?*" she asked, after a moment of silent staring out through the open window. She spoke with assumed unconcern, but there was recklessness beneath it.

"I couldn't help hearing some of it," Storrow acknowledged, by this time the more uncomfortable of the two. "I — I hadn't intended to."

The apologetic note in his voice seemed to puzzle her. She looked at him with clearing eyes. Then she laughed a little, though still with a touch of recklessness.

"We both seem to be having our troubles today," she said, with a listless push at her tumbled crown of hair.

"I'm afraid I've been the cause of yours," he deprecated. He made note of her upward glance towards what had once been his own window. He forced a laugh, to make light of his predicament.

"Oh, I'm barred out up there. They thought I'd given up my room; they've put a woman in it."

She noticed his movement as he lifted his sodden handkerchief up to his mouth, for his grimace of forced mirth had started his bruised lip bleeding again. Her face grew suddenly serious. She did not speak. But, after a moment or two of meditation, she held the soiled curtain

back. It was clearly a signal for him to come in through the window. His hesitation did not escape her.

"Are you afraid?" she demanded.

"Not for myself," he explained.

"Then for what?"

"For *you*," he protested. But even as he spoke he lowered himself in through the window.

"The worst has happened," she said with acidulated levity. He noticed, the next moment, that she was pointing towards his wilted collar and tie, still resting on her dresser top. "He saw *those!*"

"Who saw them?" asked Storrow, colouring in spite of himself.

"That man Krassler," she said with a shrug.

"But who is Krassler?"

"He's the man who was just up here trying to presume on his privileges."

"His privileges?" repeated Storrow.

"He's a third-rate producer who seems to think I ought to kaitow to him because he's promised me a part in one of his third-rate plays," was her apparently diffident answer. "But there were a few plain truths coming to him — and I guess he got them."

"Then you're — you're an actress?" ventured Storrow, with a stress on that all-explanatory word which she seemed to resent.

"About as much as you're a sculptor," she retorted, by way of punishment for that demonstrated provincial interpretation of her calling. Then as she fanned herself with a ragged-edged palm-leaf she explained that she had been in musical comedy for the last two seasons. She had "worked" her first year in an English pony-chorus, and then had a "show-girl" part in *The Rialto Widow*, and at the beginning of the summer was doing an eccentric dance in *The Grapevine Girls* when she slipped and broke her ankle. It broke with a sound like a pistol-shot, she told him, and they had to carry her

" off." It had laid her up nearly all summer, and she had been stifling there for two months, with the city as empty as a wilderness. And it was that man Krassler, as much as anything, who had kept her waiting there, for he had promised her a speaking part in *The Silent Singer* — and now the whole applecart was over.

" But there are other chances, aren't there?" asked Storrow, oppressed by the embittered undercurrent of her flippancy.

" I suppose so," was her listless retort. " But I can't go back to dancing, even if I wanted to. And I *won't* go back to the chorus. And it's not easy, in the legitimate, until you've shown them you've got it in you."

It was all a new world to the man from the North, but he acknowledged, perfunctorily, that he understood. She couldn't help succeeding, he repeated to himself, as he studied her. Yet that compactly modelled body was less of an enigma to him now, since the root of its mysterious sexlessness had been laid bare to him. That was something peculiar to her profession, he remembered, the same as with athletes, or with models, or with children still in their careless age of innocence.

" Waiting's about the hardest work you can do, isn't it?" she asked him. He did not answer her at once, for he was watching the undulatory small movements of her shoulders as she slipped into a rose-coloured kimono. It was not until she snapped on the electric-lights, at each side of her dresser, that he noticed the garment to be both faded and threadbare. She paused, after a perfunctory dab at her face with a powder-puff, and looked at him over her shoulder.

" You're hungry, aren't you?" she asked. There was appeal in the easy companionability of that question.

" No," he acknowledged. " But I *am* thirsty. I could drink a gallon!"

She crossed to the telephone and sent an order for ice-water down to the office. Then she set up a small

collapsible table, spread a fresh towel across its top, and lifted the lid of the steel-bound Taylor trunk on the far side of the room. From this trunk she took out a tin box of biscuits, a marmalade-jar, and a pot of cream cheese. When the bell-boy arrived with the ice-water, she met him at the door with her stoneware pitcher, with a careless "Thank you, Jake" as the broken ice rattled from its granite container. Then she shut the door and locked it.

"Don't drink that," she said, intercepting Storrow as he stepped forward to take the pitcher from the table. She crossed to the bathroom and produced two tumblers, which she wiped on a face-towel. She next appeared with a bottle wrapped in a wet cloth, a bottle not unlike an Indian club in shape. The care with which she handled this piqued Storrow's curiosity as her fingers lifted bits of broken ice from the pitcher and dropped them into the glasses.

"I've two of these left from Pannie Atwill's party," she explained as she took up the bottle again, unswathed it, twisted the lead-foil from its neck and inserted a buttonhook under its wiring. Then with her strong white fingers she began working at the cork, turning the bottle about as she pushed on its swollen cap.

The liquid from the opened bottle bubbled pleasantly as it was poured into the tumblers.

"This'll be better for you than water," the bare-armed girl assured her visitor.

That visitor, as he took the still bubbling glass from her fingers, remembered that he had very seldom drunk such stuff. As a boy once at a county-fair he had made himself very sick by taking too much bottled ale. That had left him with a vague aversion to alcohol in any form, but he had held aloof from it chiefly for the reason that he had never felt the need of it. His unjaded sense of well-being had never called for any such lash. So he stared down at the warm amber liquid in which the last

of the ice had disappeared, stared down at it without either appetite or enthusiasm. Then he remembered that it was wet, and that his throat was dry.

He had gulped down a half-glass of it, scarcely conscious of its tepidity, when he noticed that the girl who had seated herself across the table from him was sipping her glass fastidiously, like a bird drinking from a fountain-rim, and he blushed at the thought of what must have seemed grossness on his part. She stopped, sober-eyed, at his sudden movement of repudiation.

"It even spoils champagne, doesn't it, having to take it like that?" she observed with a glance at the thick-glassed tumbler.

But it had not altogether spoiled the wine for Storrow. It made him think of warm apple-cider, and caused his nose to sting, but the effect, on the whole, was much more pleasureable than he had expected. He noticed, as he finished his glass with more tempered gulps, that it was bringing a faint tingle into his finger-tips and a steady but not unpleasant throb to the poached-egg lump along the side of his head. He became conscious of a faint singing in his ears, such as he had heard about a bee-hive on a sunny afternoon. Then he remembered that the things which he had so recently accepted as misfortunes were in some way touched with humour, if one only looked at them in the right light. The world, after all, was a pretty rosy place to live in, only there were certain things, certain tremendously vital things, which he must explain to the girl across the table from him.

He sat there, big with a desire to talk, yet with the habit of a life-time shouldering him back into his Scotch mist of reticence. He seemed satisfied to watch the white-skinned girl moving about behind a thin veil of mystery. That newer mood of his seemed to give a warmer red to her lips. It threw a softer glimmer about the satiny white skin, a new music in the sound of her voice, which at times seemed to come to him from a

great distance and then again to be confidentially close to his ear, so that it mingled musically with the sunny afternoon beehive singing.

His second glass, as they began to eat, gave him a courage which was almost a puzzle to him. He wondered why his companion should remain so quiet-eyed, so undisturbed by the liquid miracle which was sending music through all his veins. She leaned over, cool-handed, to empty the last of the bottle into his tumbler.

"What made that scar?" he suddenly asked, looking at her bare shoulder. She drew in her chin, with a side-twist of the head that brought creases in the satiny neck-skin, and glanced down at the scar.

"Oh, that!" she said.

"What made it?" he repeated.

"I let a hot curling-iron fall there."

It seemed a deep scar, from so trivial a cause. Swayed by an impulse which was still impersonal, he reached out and ran an explorative finger along that blemish on so perfect a plane. Many a time, in much the same manner, he has thumbed a roughness out of his modelling clay. It surprised him to find how cool and firm her flesh was.

"*Don't do that!*"

Her command was so sharp, with a little intake of the breath as she uttered it, that it startled him. She backed away as Storrow's puzzled glance rose to her face. She was still staring at him, with slightly widened eyes, as she sank into her chair. The two of them sat there in silence, for several moments, studying each other across the narrow table that stood between them. Then the girl, with a vague trouble on her lowered brow, resumed her eating of cheese and crackers. Storrow did the same, oddly sobered, with a more tempered drone of music in his ears. Yet her half-diffident shoulder-shrug, as she licked the cheese-crumbs from her fingers, did not escape him.

"I can't help wondering," she finally said as she sat back in her chair, "why you don't do things of real men and women, if you're going to be a sculptor. Haven't you wanted to?"

Storrow seemed glad of that excursion into a side-issue.

"Yes; but you can't get models, in the country I came from," he explained.

This seemed incredible to her. "There must be models," she ventured, "wherever there are men and women."

"Not up in Chamboro," he averred.

"What's Chamboro?" she asked.

"That's where I'd fitted up an old barn as a studio," he explained to her, spurred into candour by her casual acceptance of such things, but still thick-tongued from the beaded amber liquid that had come out of the tumbler beside him. "I wanted to do life studies. I knew I had to do 'em. There was a young girl up there, a girl of about eleven or twelve, half wild. I wanted to do her in clay. So I went to her mother about it. They were a shiftless lot, but she was glad enough of the money. Sitting around while I worked, though, seemed to get on her nerves, so the third day she sent the youngster over to my studio alone."

He laughed as he came to a stop. But it was not a mirthful laugh.

"What happened?" demanded the girl across the table.

"A couple of elderly maiden ladies who were collecting for the Social Purity League happened to look in and see that youngster as I'd posed her there. She was naked, of course, with a side-twist of the skinny little torso that made me feel I'd be a second Robin if I could only catch it."

"Go on!" she prompted out of the ensuing silence.

"The two maiden-ladies carried the news of what they'd seen in to the village. Then about all Chamboro

came back. They came in a regular *possé*. They were very foolish about it all."

"What'd they do?" she demanded as he came to a stop for the second time.

"They burned down the barn, for one thing. It was their original intention, I understand, to tar and feather me — but they didn't quite succeed in that. It left me a marked man, though, as far as Chamboro's concerned. So I swung back to the wild-animal stuff, and went up over the Height of Land, up beyond Abbitibi, to study my subjects."

The girl leaned slightly forward, with one hand grasping each side of the table in front of her, her lips slightly parted, bewilderment in her staring eyes.

"Do you mean to say," she slowly intoned, "that they thought you'd done something wrong?"

He was able to laugh at her amazement, an unmoderated laugh in which she was finally able to join him.

"You poor boy!" she said, suddenly sobering, with a hand-movement towards him that implied both pity and comprehension, abstraction creeping into her eyes again as she meditated over what he had just said to her. It seemed to give her a great deal to think over, for she sat there as motionless as a statue, for several minutes. Then, she began to laugh again, easily, bubblingly, as though some hitherto unperceived humour of his predicament was slowly revealing itself to her.

His first impulse was to resent that laughter, feeling that it was in some way at his expense. But the light on the upturned face was so appealing, the lines of the red mouth were so warm in tone, the poise of the careless-held body was so nymph-like, that he was ready enough to swing in with her mood of merriment. Then they both stopped short, as though demanding of themselves a reason for laughing.

"After Chamboro, and things like that," she said out

of that second silence, "no wonder you were afraid of me."

"But I'm not afraid of you," he contended, warm with a wine that was never poured from bottles.

"You *were*," she cried, more than ever nymph-like.

"That was only because you seemed so beautiful," he heard his own lips protesting, as he noticed for the second time that convulsive intake of the breath.

"Say that again," she murmured, leaning forward with a dreamy intentness on her face.

It was provocative in its sudden languid loveliness, that face which swayed before him in a mist. He could feel his pulses pound.

She seemed not altogether unconscious of that quick bodily conflagration, for she rose slowly from her chair. If it had been her intention to move away from the table he arrested that movement by catching at the hem of the rose-coloured kimono and swinging her about so that she faced him where he sat. Yet he continued to sit there, shaking a little as he stared up into her face.

"*Oh, you boy! You adorable boy!*" she cried out with a sudden little forward swoop of the body as she thrust her hands into the thick mat of his crisply-curling hair. It seemed almost an expression of hunger, more a movement of appropriation than one of surrender, as she pushed back his face so that she stared directly into it as she stood above him.

"You *are* beautiful," he whispered, dizzily, as he rose to his feet close beside her.

The movement freed his head from her clasp, so that her drooping hands rested on his shoulders. Her draped arm drooped closer about him, like a wing. He was conscious, for one misty moment, of a besieging artillery of perfumes, of her quick-taken breath, of the appeal of the heavy red mouth.

Then he caught her in his arms with a savagery that left her suddenly relaxed and heavy-lidded. He crushed

her closer and still closer with those uncomprehendingly cruel muscles and sinews that seemed made of iron. Yet she clung to him, more hungrily than ever, as though that unthinking physical cruelty were something to be welcomed, and her head sank back on one upcrowded shoulder, abandonedly, as his hungering mouth sought and found the heavy red lips. Time was forgotten, and the world, and all the past that time had recorded upon its troubled surface. . . .

Then time and the world came back to them, abruptly, with the repeated shrill of a telephone-bell on the far side of the room.

They opened their eyes as they stood there still locked together like pterodactyls. In the man's eyes was questioning bewilderment, in the woman's a heavy and languorous protest. It was the tension in the man's arms alone that relaxed as the shrill of the bell repeated itself.

"Don't go," she whispered, as he made a movement as though to answer that call. She lifted her hand to the back of his head, and bent his face closer to her own. And it was her lips this time which met and clung to his.

He drew back suddenly, with alarm in his eyes, forgetful of even the reiterated peal of the bell behind him.

"There's blood on your face," he gasped, lifting his hand to the bruised and tender lip which he had so completely forgotten.

Her face, now a dead white, looked almost grotesque with its Columbine-like blotches of red.

"I don't care," she said, almost sleepily, with her limp hands trailing after him as he drew still farther away.

Then, with a breath that was both deep and audible, she crossed slowly to the telephone and twisted a handkerchief about the clapper of the still jangling bell, silencing it.

Storrow watched her. He felt, as he stared across the faded room at her in her faded rose drapery, that a thousand unseen masons were building a thousand-stoned wall

about him. He watched her as she moved towards him with slow and meditative strides. He even fell slowly back, until his shoulders were against the wall. She smiled, without mirth, at his vague frown of protest.

"*What's the use?*" she quietly asked, as she lifted her face up to his.

## CHAPTER THREE

OWEN STORROW, one week later, was a not altogether happy young man. His misery, in fact, was a two-fold one. He found himself not only unhappy in his surroundings but even more unhappy in his own mind. The memories which he brought into that new environment were anything but tranquillizing.

It had been a mistake, he told himself, to accept Augusta Kirkner's offer and establish his studio under her roof. He had come to the wrong place, and in doing so he had come in the wrong way and at the wrong time. The change, both the inner and the outer one, had been too abrupt. It had proved as cataclysmically disturbing as an earthquake, involving too sharp a rupture of all the filaments of habit and association. It had been wrench enough to be deprived, at a stroke, of the rough freedom of his woodsman's life. But the loss of that primordial freedom of the body had been followed by an episode — and in his own mind Storrow still insisted that it was merely an episode — which gave every promise of resulting in a captivity of the soul.

For Storrow looked back on his last night at *The Alwyn Arms* as a sort of dream, some of it blurred in outline, some of it photographic in vividness. He was neither ascetic by instinct nor straight-laced in his outlook on the world. But this, his first adventure along that water-way of passion which twines now silver and now sullen across the huddled destinies of men, had come upon him too abruptly for consideration. It had seemed to leap upon his shoulders like a wild-cat from a tree-

branch. And when the singing bees of wonder had died down in his brain he had realized the necessity for escape.

The inevitable reaction of exhaustion had come, the ebb-tide of emotion over-taxed. And his haunting impression of being walled up alive was still horrible to him.

He had tried to slip away as stealthily and guiltily as a burglar slips away from the scene of his crime. The girl had stirred and wakened. But she had been too tired to pay much attention to him. He had made his escape without speaking to her again, without explaining what he could scarcely explain to himself. He stole away with an ache for freedom still in his soul, with a vague dread of invisible filaments weaving about him, with a horror of suffocation which above all things must be fought against.

That feeling of stealth with which he had taken his departure, in fact, added materially to the sum of his shame. It had stayed with him during his transit down through that still slumbering hotel in the early morning hours. He had felt the abominable necessity of making himself inconspicuous to every casual eye. Even after his escape from that house of tumultuous and hectic memories he found himself further embarrassed, first by the need of fresh linen and later by the surreptitious manner in which this apparel had to be purchased. In that Sixth Avenue store where he was looked over with questioning eyes he felt remarkably like a porch-climber intent on a quick disguise. Then he had eaten heavily, though joylessly, after which he had just as joylessly sought shelter in a sordid side-street hotel, where he went to bed at a time when the rest of the world, the honest world of honest workers, was emerging to its daily tasks. He went to bed sore in body, exhausted in spirit, with a chain of newly-formed memories dragging through his brain. Even his sleep in that small and stifling room was shot through with dreams of intertwined bodies which seemed

in some mysterious way associated with his *La Porte de l'Enfer*. And these uncontrolled visions seemed to build up still wider horizons of shame about him, horizons along which he frontiered in a vague horror of homelessness.

Then in his waking hours he struggled, as youth must, to reorganize his shattered self-respect. The looms of after-thought busied themselves in weaving some essential fabric of extenuation. He told himself it had all come upon him so suddenly, so overwhelmingly, that he was little more than a wayfarer who had stooped to drink from a pool but had wakened to find himself tumbled headlong into its strangling depths. And if there had been the threat of strangulation, he had at least effected his escape. He had escaped, he assured himself, because escape had seemed to him the only avenue to redemption. He had thought, it was true, very much more of himself than of anything he might be leaving behind him. But he had staggered back to freedom impressed with the feeling that if he nursed a wound, it was a wound which the ever-healing hand of Time would make less painful.

Time, he discovered during the next few days, had indeed made that wound less painful, and therein lay a new source of distress to his fretful spirit. His feelings, he began to find, were not as simple as he had striven to make them. For tangled up with regret was a shadowy yet persistent sense of triumph, of murkier distances that had been added to the perspective of life. The vistas of experience had been suddenly widened, and into those new distance he stared with slightly eager if unhappy eyes. This consciousness that he could even vaguely exult in evil, in any black harvest of knowledge that was rooted in wrong, gave birth to a later and subsidiary shame in his breast.

Then, as the days dragged by, a new and even more disturbing discovery came to him. He beheld memory throwing about that strange last night at *The Alwyn*

*Arms* an ever warmer and warmer glow. As youth reasserted its prerogatives of vigour he found himself going back to those scenes much less unwillingly. He had foolishly accepted the entire affair as something that was over and done with, as something which had been taken out of his life as conclusively as his hand-bags had been carried out of his surrendered hotel-room. It was something so episodic, so transient, he had argued with himself, that it would eventually leave neither mark nor memory. The thing had been violent, he kept assuring himself, and its own violence had already shaken it to pieces. It had also been sordid, and for that sordidness he felt ironically grateful, recognizing in it his gateway of deliverance. So it would never happen again. He would see to that. He had never asked for such things. He had avoided them. It was, he persisted, nothing more than an episode.

Yet in its very abruptness, its very brevity, it remained monumental. It kept confronting him as a blind rock-wall of wonder, rather than as the gentle ascent and decline of often-travelled paths. Its very brevity left it poignant, with no sense of completion, teasing to the imagination. He found the beak of Curiosity in his vitals, forbidding him peace.

Yet out of the laborious exploitation of that mental unrest of his he wrung a final but attenuated consolation. It was through such things, he remembered, that men knew life. And to know life, after all, was the supreme end of living. His mood even merged into that of the flagellant who finds satisfaction in the lash which should have brought him pain. What he most regretted, as time went on, was the vesture of ugliness — since the æsthetic was so vital a factor in his existence — with which a bewildering new experience had come to him.

That gradual shift of front continued during the preoccupied yet empty days when he was installing his belongings in the music-room of the Kirkner house, frown-

ing solemnly down on its solemn Brooklyn avenue. He had gone to that house as to a refuge. He was ready to welcome its ponderous yet shielding respectabilities. He would be glad of its restraints, its solemn surburban seclusiveness. And if he went into his step-aunt's home oppressed by the feeling of being an impostor, of carrying with him a bundle of mysteries which he was compelled to keep tight-packed, like a spy in enemy territory, he was frankly grateful for that *interregnum* of solitude which preceded Augusta Kirkner's return from Narragansett. He was glad enough of that interval by himself, with nothing but a *corps* of self-effacing servants between him and his thoughts.

He found himself, in fact, face to face with a series of sharp readjustments in which no outsider could be of any possible help to him. Yet as time went on he missed more and more the companionable noises of *The Alwyn Arms*. He had a hunger for something more than self-effacing servants to speak to. He thought of Broadway and its tributary streets of unrest as something remote, as something no longer accessible. He thought of them as an exile thinks of a lost fatherland. But more often than of all the rest he thought of the girl called Torrie. He felt the need of seeing her again, of explaining to her, of proving that his flight had not been founded on cowardice. He remembered the milk-white shoulders, and the scar at the base of the throat rounded like a pigeon's. He remembered intimate nestling movements that brought him up short in the midst of his meagre attempts at work.

After such thoughts he found the luxurious emptiness of the wax-floored music-room which had been given up for his use impressing him as something bald and hard, as impersonal as a monk's cell. He fought against this impression by doing what he could to convert the big room with the tempered north light into more of a work-studio. He did this by a studied parade of his imple-

ments of labour, and a more studied assorting of his own casts about the room. He tacked his Chinese prints against the wall-paneling and deliberately freckled the over-polished floor with a spattering of modelling-clay. But even the friendly inanimate forms of his own fashioning now seemed like souvenirs treasured by an exile. He felt more and more like a prisoner engaged in the decoration of his cell. For large and spacious as that new abode seemed to him, he began to find a feeling of restraint in its very shadows, an absence of elbow-room in its very spaciousness. And even before the return of Augusta Kirkner and her daughter he found himself wondering if his relationship with the rest of that household would not prove an impossible one. Their offer, extended through some too tenuous tie of kinship, had been generous enough. But to Storrow it began to savour of that mediæval benevolence once extended by the munificent to the indigent troubadour. More and more often he recalled his earlier freedom in the sister city across the East River, his privilege of eating just when and where he pleased, his unscrutinized comings and goings at *The Alwyn Arms*.

That turned his mind still again back to the white-armed girl who was now so often in his thoughts, to recollections of gesture and pose and glance, to speculations as to how sincere she had been when she had whispered so sleepily and so close to his ear that now he must never leave her. He even found it not unpleasant to meditate on remembered hesitations and reviewed bewilderments, for if by some obliquity of mental process he had come to wring a mild sense of martyrdom out of that experience, his martyrdom had already reached the phase where he could bathe his hands in the flame.

## CHAPTER FOUR

SORROW was still engaged in his silent struggle to fit himself into a less compromising environment when Mrs. Kirkner and her daughter returned to their city home. So smoothly did the intricate cogs mesh and revolve in that quiet-chambered abode that the return had been effected before he was even aware of it. The knowledge of that advent, in fact, came to him from Medberry, the aged butler, in the adroit intimation that he might possibly be expected to "dress" for dinner that night. He was still in his studio, however, with his well-smudged modelling-gown on, when Charlotte Kirkner tapped on the door and entered.

Of "Cousin Charlotte," as by a stretch of truth he had once called her, he still nursed a vague and boyish memory of a very pale child with very big eyes, unspeakably spindly legs, and a passion for a broken doll known as "Alice-Emily." It came as a shock to him, accordingly, to find himself confronted by a quiet-mannered and extremely self-possessed young woman of at least twenty years. Yet her smile was almost a timid one as she stood studying him out of a pair of cogitative grey eyes that were unmistakably friendly.

"Owen, how brown you are!" she said as they shook hands. And a tinge of colour showed along her pale cheeks as she spoke.

"I'd never have known you," admitted Owen, obviously constrained, prepared to dislike her at the first intimation of hostility. But she impressed him as being too neutral-tinted, too timorously passive, to awaken any positive fires of opposition. She was shell-like, he felt,

as delicately tinted and polished as mollusk labium, and probably as soft in texture.

"Are you going to like it?" she asked, with a glance about the new studio. She intended to do what she could, he realized, to make him feel at home.

"Could one help liking it?" he evaded. And she coloured again, dimly conscious of some lack of genuineness in his retort.

"Mother was sorry, of course, not to be here. But our month at Narragansett wasn't up until last night. And mother never changes her plans."

"I'm afraid I've already interfered with them," he admitted, wondering as he spoke just how much the younger woman's personality had been subjugated by the iron will of the older woman.

"No, everything will go along exactly the same," was the girl's almost listless reply. "After Narragansett we always go to the Swansea cottage for a month. So by next Monday you'll have the whole house to yourself again."

"And you like being on the wing, that way?" he asked, following the meditative grey eyes as they studied first *The Sentinel Wolf* and then *The Last Of The Pack*. And it was his turn to colour a little at her head-nod of approval after an inspection of the second figure.

"My liking it or not scarcely counts," she explained, coming back to him. "Mother, you know, is not at all well."

"I'm sorry to hear that," was Storrow's perfunctory murmur, swayed by the persuasion that the illness in question was mostly that of too much wealth and too great a burden of idleness. He realized, as Charlotte half-humorously went on to explain her mother's method of living, that Augusta Kirkner was one of those birds of passage peculiar to American civilization, a spirit driven from place to place by mysterious migratory impulses to which she responded as implacably as wren and robin

responded to nature's call for seasonal advances and retreats. There was the predestined winter flight to Florida, the unvarying vernal shift to Lakewood, the inevitable August at Narragansett, the duly allotted four weeks at the cottage at Swansea-On-The-Sound, after which came the accustomed twelve weeks in the City itself.

Yet Augusta Kirkner, Storrow realized as he sat across the table from her that night at dinner, was anything but a caprice-controlled and flighty-minded woman. She had brought to the management of her estate that clear-headedness which it demanded. To the sorrows of widowhood she had likewise brought a stoicism too granitic to give rootage to any touch of bitterness. She knew life, demanded lucidity, and prided herself on her frankness of speech. There was something methodic even in her restlessness. Her vagaries of comment were as deliberate as those repeated shiftings from front to front which were made with a calculated precision that tended to translate them into the mechanical. It was only later on that Storrow awakened to the fact that her often disconcerting impatience of mind was based largely on a condition of body studiously and even heroically hidden away from the rest of the world, a condition arising from a disorder which only the knife could hope to remedy. But Augusta Kirkner, with all her strength of will, had not the strength to face that knife. With everything to add to the colour and depth of life, that secret inner malady was always there at her elbow, as soft-voiced as a second Medberry, to remind her of a coming engagement which could not be avoided. And if she sighed involuntarily as she stared at the newcomer under her roof, it was at the memory that youth and vigour are indeed a precious gift.

"Your mother, Owen, was a wonderful woman," she told him over her coffee-cup in the library, "wonderful in everything but her choice of a husband."

If Storrow winced it was not so much because of her

candour as it was for that thrust at the dead. His eye, during that moment of tension, met Charlotte's. She too flushed a little. But her quick glance of comprehension, of sympathy, prompted him to remain silent.

He was conscious of that repeated tacit plea for patience when later in the evening they went up to the music-room for an examination of the new studio. The older woman had cursorily inspected a handful of Storrow's pencil-studies and had abstractedly admitted that a couple of his modellings in clay were "pretty." That word stung, like the briar on a rose-stem. And again, in Charlotte's quick glance of understanding, he was conscious of a silent compact between himself and the girl who found herself helpless to champion his cause by anything more substantial than an outthrust of hand to invisible hand.

"Are you going to do honest work here?" demanded the older woman.

"I hope to," he said with sudden constraint, once more conscious of the perilous compression which was cheating him of the very air his timber-wolf life demanded. And his instinctive passion for elbow-room, for untrammelled freedom of movement, prompted him to add: "But I may have some trouble, of course, about getting models over here!"

"Models?" demanded Augusta Kirkner. "What kind of models?"

"The kind I'll always need for my work," Storrow explained with a suavity which would have been recognized as dangerous by only those who knew him well, "figure models."

"Figure models?" repeated Augusta Kirkner. The actual meaning of the words seemed to be filtering very slowly through to her consciousness. "You don't mean women — women who make money out of their nakedness?"

"They wouldn't be of much use to me," said Storrow,

with a tendency to exult in her slowly growing horror, *" unless they were naked! "*

If he spoke with a calmness that bordered slightly on flippancy, his feelings were more profoundly involved than he pretended. He could remember only too vividly, in fact, his trepidation at the engagement of his first figure-model. He had known none of the ordinary art-students' life-class initiation into such things, and keen as he was to correct his modelling in wax of an Indian girl's back, he had been a very unhappy young man as that first model came to him one morning in Montreal and quietly suggested that she could undress behind his screen. He had stood listening to those sounds of unrobing, wincing at the sight of lingerie flung carelessly up across the screen-top. Then his courage had failed him. He had called out that he had remembered an overlooked engagement and had vanished from the studio to walk the streets for countless miles, leaving a dollar-bill in one of the sadly worn shoes of that sadly puzzled young woman.

" And it will be impossible for you to do your work, without having those women come here? " his thoughtful-eyed hostess was demanding of him.

" All artists seem to use them," he said with a perhaps unnecessary assumption of world-weary sophistication, followed by a pregnant enough glance up over his shoulder towards a print of Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love.* Augusta Kirkner and her daughter both followed the line of his gaze. They both stood for a moment in silence regarding the bodily splendour of that half-reclining figure gazing so tranquilly out on a world where youth withered and passed away and beauty itself vanished in tears and time.

The immemorial loveliness of the figure seemed to tranquillize them, to touch them into a humility which neither of them attempted to articulate. The older woman, in fact, crossed to a chair and sat down in it, with a sigh.

"I've been in the *Borghese,* of course," she admitted, with her gaze now fastened on Owen Storrow, and arriving at the conclusion, without being quite conscious of it, that this youth was much more attractive than anything he might ever be able to cut out of wax or mould out of clay. "I know the *Louvre,* and I've an inkling of what is art and what is not art. I've always known that such women were used, of course. But I've never thought of you, Owen, as mixed up with this sort of thing."

"Why not?" he demanded, depressed by the prospect of those obsolete and futile old problems which it now seemed so foolish to revive.

"I suppose it's because you're not a Titian, or a Zoloagua, or even an Epstein. You see, you're so young."

"That," retorted Storrow, "is a sin which Time may possibly correct."

He was thinking, as he spoke, that he already knew life much better than these women imagined, these sheltered and shrouded women whose lives were ruled by rite. His eye followed Charlotte Kirkner as she crossed the studio, as though announcing her withdrawal from a discussion which was proving distasteful to her.

A wave of impatience swept through him as he stared after her, impatience at her reserves and reticences, her conventional shynesses and her swift changes of colour. Under all those pretences and pretexts, he told himself, he knew her better than she knew herself. For now he understood women. He knew even her minutest line of body, under its undissimulating screen of clothing. There was no longer any mystery about that body. There was no longer the allurement of knowledge denied. Her little poses and evasions of sex were almost an irritation to him. They were tribal affectations and impostures, as hollow as the veil of harems, as transparent as the abortive bride-flights of the Chippewas.

"I'm a woman of the world, Owen," Augusta Kirkner was saying to him. "You may think I'm narrow, but

the one thing I like to see is results. And I can't help wondering if you'll get results enough to make it worth while for what you'll have to pay for this sort of thing."

"What," he demanded, "will I have to pay?"

"It seems to me you'll have to pay the natural man's natural respect for women. No, don't misjudge me. I know that all art is noble enough, when it's big art. But I also know something about the studio-set that frets about its fringes. I've seen them, both in Paris and here at home. And you can't get mixed up in that slack Bohemian set without losing more than you imagine. If you do, you'll surely find yourself out of it, out of life, out of the centre of things, the things that count."

Storrow laughed. But it was a mirthless laugh.

"Well, it's like war," he protested. "I've got to take my chance in that. But since form happens to be my medium, it's only through form that I can express myself."

"You mean that's the only thing that interests you?" she asked, so intent on her own ends that she remained unconscious of the degree to which she was persecuting still ardent youth.

"I have to express myself," he stubbornly and somewhat listlessly contended.

"Well, if you must do that, why not do it respectably?" she inquired. And the worst of it, he found, was that she was in earnest.

"I don't think I care to be respectable," he finally replied, realizing his Rubicon lay before him and might as well be crossed. "I can't even waste time on it. I've certain ends to reach, and certain work to do. To reach those ends I've got to have life studies. I've got to draw and model from the nude. If that is going to involve situations that are cramping, that are embarrassing, the only thing left for me to do is to move back to quarters where I'll find freedom, the freedom I've got to have."

She looked up quickly, at the quick note of passion in that ultimatum of his. She was a woman who seldom

encountered opposition and even less frequently countenanced it. Then she drew herself together, with an effort.

"My last promise to your mother, Owen, was that I'd always help you if I could. And I think I can help you, for notwithstanding my loss of many liberties, I still have a small amount of influence in this city. So don't jump too youthfully at snap judgments. I have no intention of interfering with what you feel to be your life-work. And if you need women without clothes on, for that work, by all means do what the other artists have to do — only please keep them strictly to your studio."

That, Storrow was prompted to retort, was the trouble with one's own family — they refused to realize that one ever grew up, that one ever had a mind and a mission of one's own. But a glance across the studio at Charlotte's face prompted him to sudden silence. On that face he once more saw what was almost a look of pleading. She was imploring him, he felt, for patience, for the endurance of that, apparently, which she herself had so often endured. Yet the next moment his memory had flashed back to the woman of *The Alwyn Arms*. He pictured her as she had sat half-dressed on a trunk-top, abstractedly pulling on a pair of thin silk stockings. Then his thoughts flashed still deeper back into the past, as thoughts have the habit of doing, and he saw still another woman, an older and gentler-eyed woman, sitting on a broken marble bench above the misty blue of Lake Erie. "Boy, boy, *I want you to be good!*" that woman had cried out, tremulously, with one hand on his hair and her brooding eyes fixed on his own slightly abashed eyes. That woman had been his own mother, his own mother to whom they had been neither just nor generous. And his smile hardened with his heart as he looked up again at the sound of Augusta Kirkner's voice.

"But we won't be interfering with you, Owen, as much as you imagine," she was saying. "Before the middle of the week we'll be away again, so you'll have your free-

dom, after all. And by the time we're back you'll be feeling more at home." She rose from her chair and crossed the room with that qualified dignity of a woman of importance who has conceded ground to her enemy. "By the way, we're lunching at Sherry's tomorrow with the Roubetskois. They are people who might prove very helpful to you. So I hope you will be able to join us."

It had been very casually announced, that luncheon at Sherry's. But even before he caught Charlotte's anxious eye he knew that it involved both a challenge and a test. Still again he sensed some silent pleading for a suspension of judgment.

"I'll be very glad to," he said. He forced a smile as he spoke, though it annoyed him unreasonably to notice that the girl across the room was watching him with the quick expectancy of a circus-dog when the trainer slaps a polished boot-leg with his whip. That flash of annoyance did not escape the older woman, though she misread its meaning.

"By the way, Owen, what clubs do you belong to?" she inquired, with a matter-of-factness that was not without its delicately chastening cruelty.

"None," retorted Storrow, puzzled by the sudden invocatory look from the girl on the far side of the studio.

"Then what clubs do you propose to get in touch with?" asked the older woman, with slightly elevated eyebrows.

"None," was Storrow's grim response.

"But won't you rather feel the need of contact with your fellows," pursued Augusta Kirkner, her studied patience not untouched with triumph, "with other men working along the same lines?"

"It would help, of course," admitted Storrow. It was the anxious eyes across the room, and nothing else, that prompted him to passiveness. And the girl's infinitely small smile of approval did not escape him.

"Yes, I rather imagine a nice club or two *would* help!" murmured his hostess. A faint trace of colour had crept into her finely wrinkled cheek, and Storrow knew, as he watched her over-dignified retreat, that he had exasperated her. He was more disturbed, however, by Charlotte's hand-clasp and her whispered words of "Don't mind" as she smiled her fallaciously light good-bye to him. Still again her face took on its colouring of delicate shell-pink and still again spirit wirelessed some silent message to spirit. He realized more poignantly than ever, when he was alone, that a secret had in some way been established between them. Their partnership in that silent understanding seemed to link them into something closer than casual acquaintanceship. But the thought of it touched him no more profoundly than sun-glow at a city street-end touches a hungry and harried stock-broker.

## CHAPTER FIVE

STORROW had thought the thing out. He nursed no illusions as to the immediate course before him. He foresaw the inevitable. He knew that he and the Kirkner house were destined to part company, that he must move on to a less restricted environment, that he must have breathing-space about him, no matter what the cost. Yet he had deferred that impending decision, for the simple reason that Charlotte Kirkner had openly asked him to do so.

She talked to him on the way home, after the luncheon at Sherry's. They were alone in the suède-upholstered landaulet, having dropped the older woman for a committee-meeting at the Gregorian Club.

"You and mother are not going to agree," said the unhappy girl, with conviction.

"I'm sorry," acknowledged Storrow.

"I'm sorrier than you are, Owen," she found the frankness to confess. Then she went on, as though to screen that momentary surrender to candour. "What mother would like, of course, is to find you *fitting in.* She demands success, the kind of success you can recognize and label. She has no love for your lone-wolf kind of life. Yet that's the kind I feel sure you will want to lead."

"What makes you think that?"

"You'll always like to pick your own path, I know. You'll always prefer being one of the insurgents, of the non-conformers, just as I should, if I had the courage. But mother would rather see you swinging in with our

new Brooklyn Society of Artists, with something nice to hang in the annual exhibition at the Pouch Gallery, and an honourable mention by the art-critic of the *Eagle!*"

"And do you feel that way?"

"You have your own life to live," she slowly acknowledged.

"And haven't you?" he contended, with a wayward sense of irritation at the sheer fragilities of the Dresden-china spirit.

Her pale face deepened to a magnolia-pink under his slightly contemptuous gaze.

"I've never been free, the way you have," she finally said, without looking at him. He wondered what she would think if she knew just how free he had been.

"Don't you want to be?"

"We all want to be," she conceded. Then she added, after a minute of quiet thought: "And I've a feeling that you are going to help me along that line."

"How can I?" he asked.

"For one thing, when mother asks you up to Swansea next week, would you mind coming, if it's only for a day or two?"

He was arrested by the note of earnestness in her voice. There was flattery in the thought of thus sharing a second confidence with her.

"Of course I'll come," he told her, in a lighter tone. But he found it impossible to laugh the gravity out of her eyes.

"Thank you, Owen," she said with a humility which puzzled him a little. And during the rest of that drive home they lapsed into those occasional silences which mark the dethronement of formality and the accession of intimacy.

Owen Storrow did as he had promised. But he did so without enthusiasm. He accepted Augusta Kirkner's invitation to spend a few days at their Sound cottage. He caught a noon train, glad to escape from a city of still

torrid steel and stone, reminding himself that it was all merely a slight prolongation of an armistice, a deferring of final issues. For he knew now, more definitely than before, that it would be out of the question for him to remain in the Kirkner house, that freedom was too precious to be sacrificed for mere personal considerations. He must follow his own open trails, no matter where they led. He must beat down the jungle of tradition until he at least had breathing room.

His arrival at Swansea-On-The-Sound, however, was not quite the dull and diffident occasion he had anticipated. He reached the water-front, in fact, to hear a very red-faced old gentleman with binoculars shout to another old gentleman in white ducks that a cat-boat had gone over. Storrow next caught sight of a flutter of women and children along the boat-landing in front of the secluded little Club-house. Without exception they were staring out into the open Sound. One thin-legged girl of about twelve, he noticed, was weeping audibly and unreservedly.

"Boats! Somebody get boats!" one of the old gentlemen in white ducks was crying. This struck Storrow as being rather foolish, for the simple reason that there seemed to be no boats in the neighbourhood. Following the quavering arm of the other old gentleman, he peered beyond the little bay and was finally able to discern a bobbing white head in the riffled blue-green stretches of the open tide-way. The swimmer, whoever it was, had for some reason left the overturned boat, and was trying to reach shore. But that swimmer, Storrow's practised eye discerned, had a great distance to travel. And nobody seemed to be doing anything.

Storrow had pushed through the crowd, and was staring about that lonely little bay for anything that would carry a pair of oars, when he caught sight of Augusta Kirkner advancing slowly from one end of the club-house towards the boat-landing.

She stopped before him, with her hands pressed tight against her breast, in a gesture that impressed him as singularly dramatic. Her face looked pitiful, suddenly stricken with age, vapid and yellow and flabby-lined against its over-fastidiously coiffured hair, which showed up more grey than he had expected in the betraying white sunlight. There was mingled appeal and protest in her gesture, a gesture which he could not understand. He had thought her incapable, in fact, of any such disorganizing surrender to emotion.

"*It's Charlotte,*" she cried out in a stifled voice, with yet another startlingly dramatic hand-movement towards the riffled blue tideway.

"Charlotte!" repeated Storrow, backing away a step or two, from sheer shock.

"It's the first time she ever openly disobeyed me," sobbed the woman with stricken eyes.

Storrow heard that strange statement without attempting to answer it or explain it to his own mind, for he was busy jerking off his shoes and throwing aside as much clothing as he could. Then, having assured himself that the white bobbing head was still out there in the wind-riffled tideway, he said, very quietly, "I'll get her," and went over the edge of the landing-platform in a crisp and clean-cut dive which brought a forlorn little cheer from the petticoated group behind him.

Storrow knew he did not merit that cheer, much as it meant to him as he surged out with a long and steady stroke. He was conscious of a dual sense of buoyancy, a buoyancy of the body which arose from the fact that he found himself swimming in salt water after so many months of floundering about in fresh water, and a buoyancy of the mind arising from the fact that he was doing something to redeem himself in the eyes of Augusta Kirkner. He had small doubt of the outcome of that adventure. His woodland life had left him as much at home in water as on land. He was sure of his strength,

sure of his stroke, in the best of condition for any such test of endurance.

Yet he saw, as he reached the open water, that it was going to be a test of endurance, after all, a monotonous and unimpressive plugging away against those wind-riffles until he got safely back with her. It would be easy enough, outside of the work. It would be so easy, he felt that it might prove ridiculous, as destitute of any tang of peril as pulling a child out of a three-foot pond. They might even laugh at him, when he got back, for that over-theatrical header from the boat-landing.

Then he remembered that there was a possibility of the girl herself not being able to keep up until he got to her side. So he started to shout towards the bobbing head.

But he could not be sure whether or not she heard him. He could catch no answering signal from her. Her strokes, apparently, were quite feeble. So he swam harder, skirting the fringes of fatigue in an effort to reach her as quickly as possible. Above all things, he told himself, he must reach her without loss of time. He must reach her quickly no matter what it cost him. He must. He *must!*

He could hear her breathing, even before he got to her side. It was stertorious, and laboured, through the mouth, the frantic, panting gasps of a throat half-strangled with brine. Her eyes were half-shut and the white sailor-hat pinned on the back of her hair was wet and sodden, giving an untimely touch of the ridiculous to the pathetically colourless face with its open and drooling mouth and its tragically sharp cough of breath.

He called out to her still again, when quite close to her, but she did not seem to hear. She was swimming automatically, with eyes now open and a little wild. She was struggling falteringly on, without sense of direction or destination. Storrow remembered, as he saw the wild look on that face so close to him, that he might have to strike her, to stun her, before she would be passive enough

to be handled as he would be compelled to handle her. He had heard of such things being necessary. But he felt, as he came nearer, that he could never have the heart to plant a blow on that pathetically distorted face, even if she seized him with the strangle-hold of the drowning.

He remained discreetly alert, though, as he reached out an arm and cupped a hand under her drooping chin, lifting it clear of the water.

"It's all right," he assured her.

"Blub-blub," was the only sound that came from her lips.

"See, you can rest. I've got you," he repeated.

He "treaded" water, holding her up and forcibly restraining the still pulsing arms, obsessed as they were with the blind conviction that their stroke must not stop. He watched her as she filled her lungs, and ceased to *blub-blub,* and cleared her throat of its strangling brine. He even washed the mucus from her chin with Sound water.

"Now put your hand on my shoulder and rest, while I tread water," he told her. She did as he commanded quietly enough, still panting.

"If I could only breathe!" she complained.

"You will, as soon as you rest," he assured her. "No, don't fight to keep up. I've got you. Just let yourself go. That's better. See, you're all right!"

She floated there, lightly poised, with her eyes still closed. He watched her intently, treading water as he did so, to rest his own aching arms. "You're all right!" he repeated, without knowing he was speaking. He had glanced back over his shoulder at the shore-line. It seemed disturbingly far away. Then he looked back at the girl. She was breathing deeply, gratefully, in heavy shuddering breaths. But the tide had them in its teeth, and every minute was precious.

"I'd like to get off that skirt of yours," he told her.

She opened her eyes at that, for the first time. The

wildness had gone out of them. There was a tragic intentness in their gaze as they dwelt bewildered on his spray-streaked face.

"Do you mean we can get back?" she asked.

"Of course," he promptly told her. And he forced a laugh as he said the words. "Of course we'll get back. It's not even worth worrying over."

"I don't believe, Owen, that I can swim much more."

"You won't even have to swim. I'll attend to all that."

She smiled wanly, almost contentedly.

"What must I do?" she asked.

"Come closer," he told her. "I'm going to tear that waist band loose, some way or other. Now we'll slip out of it. Once more! That's better. It won't be in your way, or mine either, now. But wait a minute until we change sides. There! Now just rest that way, and slow and steady will do it."

They moved forward in silence. It was not as easy as it had promised. But Storrow kept at it, grimly, doggedly, determinedly. He wished he knew more about the tides. He wished he had an oar. He wished a motor-launch would happen along. He noticed that the full dome of the sky was a robin-egg blue. It was a beautiful blue.

"That's fine," he said aloud, smiling into the blue-white face so close to him.

"But we're not gaining," protested the girl. Storrow, with an anxious eye, measured the land-marks along the shore-line. A vague trouble began to eat at his heart. The girl was right. They had made no appreciable progress. But nothing was to be gained by acknowledging defeat.

Storrow looked back at the girl beside him. Her teeth were chattering, by this time, cluttering together like castanets. He felt infinitely sorry for her. That fragile body had never been fashioned for any such ordeal.

Fate was making unfair demands on that timorous soul, taxing it beyond its power of resistance. Life had not prepared her for such things. Yet she was making a tremendous effort to be brave. And there was a corresponding obligation for him to play his part.

"We'll make it, all right," he told her, starting forward with a stronger stroke. "Don't worry, we'll make it," he said still again, worried by a slap of brine in the face which reminded him the wind was freshening and was to be straight against him. And there were unmistakable aches in his arms now, especially in the flexor of the little finger. That, he surmised, was because the little finger was the weakest of the lot, the one most seldom used. It puzzled him, none-the-less. And the poisons of fatigue were beginning to course like acids through his over-exerted body. He watched a white house against the green clump of trees on the shore-line. They were holding their own. They might even have gained a little. But at that rate of advance, he realized, the fight was practically a hopeless one.

He asked the girl to shift her hand to his other shoulder, and when she had obeyed him he once more struck out, this time with jaw set and laboured breath through the distended nostrils. *It's all quite useless,* a voice somewhere at the back of his brain kept saying to him. And as he fought on, foot by foot, he had to warn himself not to give way to panic. But he began to wonder if death by drowning were painful. He even began to count his strokes, saying to himself: "I'll do one hundred more! I must do one hundred more!" Then fighting against the weariness that was making movement a torture, he said bitterly, "And a hundred more — a hundred — whatever happens!"

But there had to be an end. It was not humanly possible to keep on. Yet his spirit revolted against that end. It seemed too needless, too unjust, too gratuitous. That revolt broke through the mist of indifferency en-

gulfing him. It prompted him to a moment or two of galvanic struggle that left him weaker than ever. Then the blackness once more descended upon him.

The girl, turning her face sideways against the slap of the waves, was still alert enough to understand that blackness which had written its record on his face. He was breathing blubberingly, gasping and gagging, trying to say, "Ten more" and still again, "Ten more."

"Owen, let me go," she said in a voice shaking with the chill that tortured her body. "Don't bother . . . with me! Please don't!"

"Ten more!" gasped Storrow, without answering her. It was a beautiful blue, that robin-egg sky that would so soon be shut out from them.

"Then if we must . . . must go, Owen . . . I want to tell you . . . tell you I" . . .

A slap of brine shut off her words.

"Ten more," gurgled the man who wondered why all sensation had gone out of his body. They would have to go together, of course. It didn't seem fair. It didn't —

He suddenly stopped swimming. He shifted and turned, treading water again, so that he could slip one leaden arm about the puzzled girl. She stared into his face as he drew her close in to his side. She saw a foolish-looking ghost of a smile on that wet face.

"It's all right," he gasped. "They're coming — in a boat!"

He had heard the shout over his shoulder and knew it was now merely a matter of waiting. There was no further need for even his earlier jealous husbanding of strength, for that meticulous treasuring of effort. He held her close, with her tremulous blue chin just above the surface of the water, rejoicing in some wayward and wild sense of companionship at having her so close.

But he had no time to think further about that, for the boat was beside them. Storrow, ducking an oar,

caught and held the gunwale over which three excited youths were shouting contradictory commands and suggestions. It was, after all, a much older story to the man in the water than to the youths in the boat. But it took a minute or two to get his breath back.

"Two of you come to the stern," he commanded. "Now lift her easily — easily there! No, never mind me; trim your boat. And thank God you brought those blankets with you."

There was a perilous moment or two of tipping and bobbing and canting, an excited clutching at wet clothing, followed by an awkward but effective heave of a limp body into the boat.

"The Commodore sent this flask of brandy," explained the oldest of the boys as Storrow drew himself aboard, dripping like a Newfoundland-dog. There were, he saw, an absurd number of blankets. So he wound a three-fold layer of them about the shivering girl. Then he took her in his arms, holding the brandy-flask to her lips and compelling her to drink. She swallowed the fiery liquor obediently, until she choked and could swallow no more. Then the shivering stopped, and with a contented stirring or two of the body she lay closer to him.

"You'd better take some of that yourself," suggested one of the youths as he draped a blanket about Storrow's wet shoulders.

Storrow drank from the flask, grateful for the sense of warmth and well-being that coursed through his body. He became conscious of an inter-communicating warmth, too, between the blanket-wrapped figure in his arms and himself. It was not unpleasant to hold her there. He held her in his arms, in fact, all the way back to the boat-landing. There, still thick-headed from the brandy he had swallowed, he quite overlooked the fact that a welcoming crowd was cheering him. It took all his attention to keep the moist blanket about his half-clad figure

and at the same time carry the girl and himself with dignity.

After a cup of hot coffee and a change into commandeered apparel that fitted him none too well, Storrow found himself the possessor of a clearing head and a body that ached acutely. He found himself also a little lonely and restless in spirit, since the entire household seemed preoccupied with the girl who was being put to bed and wrapped in hot blankets. As he sat in a huge chair on the huge piazza Medberry brought him a glass of old port. Storrow tried it, found it distasteful, and was just putting it to one side when the doctor who had been sent for stopped, on his way out, to shake hands with the younger man. His quick scrutiny of the tanned face with the strong white teeth soon assured him that his services would not be needed there.

"How is she?" asked Storrow.

"She's asleep," explained the other. "And she's swallowed enough three-star brandy, I imagine, to put most of us asleep," he added as he started out to his car.

Charlotte's sleep, however, was not a prolonged one. Within an hour she was awake again, drowsily but peremptorily demanding that Owen be sent to her.

Storrow found her very flushed and over-burdened with clothes but very small-looking in the big apple-wood bed. She held out a hand as he crossed hesitatingly to her side.

"You're all right?" he inadequately inquired. She turned her head so as to see him better.

"Oh, Owen!" she said. She spoke rather thickly. Her eyes filled with tears and she seemed unable to go on. She pushed aside some of the over-burdening clothes.

"*You saved my life!*" she said in a whisper which she could not keep from being tremulous. Her hand tightened about his big fingers. She seemed to be pulling him towards her as her eyes filled with tears again.

"Oh, that was nothing," he protested, turning brick-colour as she lifted both lean arms and pulled his abashed head down close until it was pressed against her shoulder.

"It was everything, Owen," protested the girl, who still kept her hands locked about his neck.

He no longer made an effort to draw away as the lean young arms strained him abandonedly to her breast. But he was stung into a meditative sort of impassivity by the thought of the coincidence of his face being fanned by a woman's breath, faintly redolent of alcohol, as that woman's eyes gazed almost hungrily into his own. He touched his lips to the flushed face that lay back so close to his. That kiss, however, approached dangerously close to the kind one gives the dead. The arms about his neck tightened convulsively.

"Oh, Owen, I love you," she murmured as she buried her face in the hollow of his neck.

"You mustn't say that," he told her, still with the barricading touch of pity in his voice, with the unrest in his heart which the timber-wolf knows when hostile shadows creep between him and his cover.

"Whatever happens, I'll always love you," she protested, with still another gush of uncontrolled tears. And he was compelled gently but firmly to disengage those blindly appropriating arms, for Charlotte's mother had come quietly into the room and stood viewing the scene with a look of gathering perplexity on her face.

"You must take this while it's hot," she quietly announced to the girl on the bed.

She was still leaning over that bed when she spoke to Storrow. "You're a brave boy, Owen," she said with a tremor of feeling which she seemed unable to control. But she preferred to keep her face averted so that he might not see the emotion in her customarily unparticipating eyes. It was Charlotte who turned her head and glanced at him, seeming to understand just how deeply

he would resent that word of "boy," with all its betrayals of an immovable but benignant condescension. And it wasn't until she heard his careless small laugh of capitulation that her brow cleared again.

## CHAPTER SIX

STORROW did not analyse his propulsion for flight. He had not even acknowledged it to be flight. But when, before the end of his week, he found a studio very much to his liking in a ruinous-fronted old building not far from Madison Square, in East Twenty-Fourth Street, he magnified that occasion into a chance which it would be calamitous to miss.

Two days later he moved back to the city. It was not, however, until the migration had been effected that he made an effort to unedge the precipitancy of his movements by a carefully worded note of explanation to Augusta Kirkner, a note which brought no response from the older woman. It was Charlotte, in fact, who three days later sent a brief but friendly letter back to Storrow's studio, wishing him happiness in his new surroundings and success in the work which she knew must mean so much to him.

Storrow, at the time, was too preoccupied to give much thought to this message. The slightly autumnal-looking and hollow-chested poster-artist from whom he was so precipitously releasing the huge sky-lighted room that was to be his home had accepted a call to draw fashion-plates for a Chicago mail-order house and was glad enough to dispose of her furniture *en bloc*. But she was less happy, Storrow realized, in leaving quarters with which, apparently, so much of her life had been linked. He found it easy enough to understand this, for already he could feel the appeal of the place. It was spacious, sequestered, amazingly quiet, a kernel of achieved com-

fort in a misleadingly rough husk of disorder. It was exactly the sort of place he was in need of.

"It's all yours now," the loose-lipped poster-girl somewhat pensively explained to him as she watched the last of her trunks being carried away. "All except that Russian samovar on the mantel there. You'll have to return that to your next-door neighbour when he gets back from Paris."

She spoke casually, but Storrow's sensitive nostrils seemed assailed by the aroma of some undefined and faded romance.

"Then I ought to know his name," he suggested as he stood at her side and joined her in staring at the unwieldy copper urn.

"His name is Alan Vibbard," the girl answered, without looking away from the samovar. And again, as he caught the ghost of a sigh from her lips, he felt that he had stumbled across the borders of some ghostly and time-worn liaison, worlds away from him and his trivial interests. He was more impressed than ever by the contrast between the unkempt hallways and the ordered homeliness of the high-ceilinged room, where the panelling of a solitary door so abruptly divided neglect from comfort. It even occurred to him that this boney and loose-lipped woman with whom life had not dealt overkindly must still hold in the core of her ungainly body some secret chamber of quietness and grace. She had called herself a "style sniper," he remembered, since most of her time and energy had been diverted to the illicit appropriation, by means of a quick eye and a quicker pencil, of newly imported dress-models not yet divulged to the trade. It had not been altogether honest, this spying and poaching on the preserves of the city's kinglier costumiers, and Storrow wondered if that looseness of conduct stood typified in her almost vulpine looseness of lip. Then he fell to wondering if he too would grow old between those walls and fall into the habit of staring back-

ward instead of forward and make room in turn for some unconcerned young newcomer.

"I hope you'll be happy here," ventured the woman from the doorway, softened apparently by the betraying shadow of thought on his own troubled brow.

"I want to do a lot of work here," qualified Storrow, seeking protection within his shell of impersonality. Yet as he looked up at the wistful-eyed woman in the strong side-light he was still again reminded of the fact, and almost jealously reminded of it, that much history had been recorded between those old walls. It was history which he could and would never know. Yet, during the next few days, he was not ungrateful for that sense of immersion in unrelated antiquities. It served, above all things, to shut him off from his own immediate past. That was something of which he preferred not to think.

It was not until the second week in his new studio that he made a discovery, small in itself, yet significant enough to send thought trooping back, again and again, to the heavy-lipped woman who had stood so wistfully studying the borrowed samovar on the mantel. When he lifted an oblong of imitation Gobelin that hung on his east wall he found under it a door, a communicating door which unmistakably opened on the studio next to his own. This door had once been covered and sealed with wall-paper. That flimsy seal, however, had been broken apart. Storrow, nettled by a curiosity by no means as rare as he imagined, pushed back the heavy iron bolt in front of him and tried the door. But to his disappointment — a disappointment which was just as promptly followed by satisfaction — he found the door held shut by what was obviously a similar bolt on its other side. So he replaced the sliding bar of metal, redraped the tapestry screen, and once again sniffed the musty aroma of tawdry and time-yellowed romance.

The mood for sustained work had not yet returned to him, so he marked time by renewing his aimless wander-

ings about the heat-stricken city. As he roamed about, once more astride the twin coursers of Curiosity and Caprice, he felt little of the discomfort which still left Manhattan so oppressive to others. Yet that city, he could see, was enduring the last of its hot spell very much as cities endure a siege. Daily its unsheltered planes of stone and brick and asphalt were swept by a brazen-faced flame-thrower that became merciful only with nightfall. Daily the canyons of the treeless streets were filled with an invisible poison-gas which left people too listless to fight against further assault. They merely endured, and waited, and prayed for a change of wind. It was the humidity, everybody about Storrow kept explaining, the windless and saturated air which made clothing hang limp and heavy on the languid body and evoked a rank incense from any region where human beings were foolish enough to pack themselves close. They went about moodily, as a rule, carrying coats and hats, covering their limbs with the lightest garments that could be used.

This was harvest-time for Storrow, whose vigorous young body faced that excessive heat without any great distress. He drifted about the city as free as the wind, eager for those pictorial aspects of life which only torrid weather brought to the open. He watched the weltering thousands streaming to the recreation-piers, the heat-weary ghetto-dwellers crowding the withered grass of the open parks, the half-clad children swarming about the dripping hydrants and the hokey-pokey barrows, the bare-throated men and women who moved languidly about in the shadows, or sat smoking and fanning in open doorways. When his legs grew tired he sat amongst them and rested. When hunger assailed him he dropped into some out-of-the-way little restaurant and ate, forgetting the heat in the rich shadows born of the never-ending battle between drawn blinds and beleaguering sun, revelling in the accidental beauty of some indifferent-eyed

young waitress with the flimsiest of cambric stretched across what might have been the pointed breasts of an Artemis.

It was in one of these places, known as "Chop-House Jake's," that Storrow had stumbled upon a surprisingly appetizing luncheon. He looked up from a broiled porterhouse which he had picked bare to the bone to find himself being surveyed by a pair of studious and half ironical eyes.

"This weather doesn't seem to have interfered much with your appetite, young man!" the stranger observed, in a crisp yet companionable voice.

"That was a steak to make you forget about weather," countered Storrow. He found himself confronted by a spare and lanky man anywhere between thirty-five and forty-five, a fastidiously apparelled and ascetic-looking man with hair turned iron-grey over the ears, humorous eyes, and a rather grim mouth.

"I come here for 'em occasionally," he acknowledged. "They're as good as you'll get in the city." He digressed into a light-hearted but comprehensive description of Manhattan's eating-places. "I'm saying all this," he concluded, "because I know you haven't been here very long."

"What makes you think that?" demanded Storrow, with a smile to unedge the brusqueness of the question.

"By that coat of tan," declared the other. The younger man thereupon explained how and where he had acquired that Madura-brown skin.

"That's great," exclaimed the older man, with a quick and unlooked-for thump of enthusiasm. "My name's Hardy, by the way."

"Not Hardy the novelist?" asked Storrow.

"Merely one of 'em — the little one," retorted the other.

"Mine's Storrow," less easily acknowledged the

younger man, feeling less lonely in that vast city of unknown faces.

"I hope we're going to be friends," announced Hardy from the serener plateaus of experience. "And I suppose you're here for work, or you wouldn't be on this gridiron of an island at the end of August. I've got a play going on myself. But it's going to be a failure."

"Why a failure?"

"Another case of too many cooks and the broth spoiled. I'm only the author, you see. So all I have to do is sit back and watch the doctors amputate! It hits you harder than ninety-six in the shade, after you've sweated blood to give 'em something more than the waffle-iron product."

They talked on, for half an hour, through the companionable haze of tobacco-smoke, until Hardy detected signs of restiveness in his younger friend. This restiveness was really based on the thirst of the woodsman's lungs for unpolluted fresh air.

"Busy today?" casually inquired the novelist.

Storrow acknowledged that he was not.

"Then what's the matter with dropping up to my digs, over on the Avenue. It's cool there, and I've some early Wolf Thompson animal sketches that will interest you."

Storrow was glad to go. He liked that older and kindly-eyed man. He enjoyed that man's talk as they sauntered across the city, skirted Greenwich Village, invaded Washington Square, and approached the narrower but more resplendent canyon of Fifth Avenue.

Hardy did most of the talking. He ridiculed the commercialized bohemianism of "The Village," with its bobbed hair and its bad art, its anarchistic free verse and its still freer sex relationships. He wrung a laugh, too, from the self-imposed pauperism of the MacDougall Alley colony and the convivial anchoritism of "The Mews." There were, of course, the producers as well as the poseurs, the trail-blazers as well as the stump-jumpers, but

the former were much too busy for attitudinizing. Storrow's guide paused long enough to point out a group or two of Italian children in the Square, and the balanced red-brick colonial of Henry James' renown, and the trade-doomed architecture of the Avenue debouching up through its ferruginous forest of skyscrapers. A very passable omelette he solemnly explained, could still be bought at *The Brevoort.*

"I like the old Street," Hardy acknowledged with genuine feeling as they went side by side up the Avenue; "it's one of the few we have with a soul of its own." It seemed an older and sedater city in which Storrow now found himself, a city of quiet side-streets and window-boxes and well-scrubbed marble steps, of polished brass knockers on white-enamelled doors, of bronze handrails leading up to panelled mahogany portals, of red brick over-run with ivy, of unpretentious three-storey homes mildly ornamented with tubbed evergreens and tiny quadrangles of turf and roses and chrysanthemums. And over all was the friendly and unsolicited tone of time, depressing Storrow at the same moment that it engaged him, dimly disturbing him by its unalleviated air of remoteness, reminding him as it did of movements and civilizations of which he had not been and never could be a part. He even saw a walled rector's garden that made him think of England, an oblong of greensward with a fountain at its centre and a flower-bordered pool in which little silver and golden fishes swam about. But the episodic soft odours of that garden evaporated in the universal grim smell of exhaust-gases from the countless passing motor-cars.

Hardy was still talking when they stopped to turn up the sandstone steps of what had once been a millionaire's mansion. But the receding tides of fashion had long since left it on the dull siltage of the roomer and the studio-renter.

"Here's where I hang out," he explained. "It has its

drawbacks, but it's worth the noise and the dust from those eternal cars."

Storrow found Hardy's apartment much simpler than he had expected. There was no clutter of rugs and armour and old brass. Hardy's work-room, in fact, would have seemed bald, but for its revolving stand of reference-books. It had the appearance of being organized for work, and work alone. Its almost commercial atmosphere was increased by the presence of an elaborate filing-cabinet and an electric-fan on its shelf above the stenographer's table. It was only in the living-room to the front, overlooking the Avenue, that Storrow found some slight tendency towards luxuriousness. On the walls of that room he saw a pastel by Blum, three Zorn etchings, and a Carrol Beckwith portrait of Hardy himself as he must have appeared some ten or twelve years earlier in life. What caught the visitor's attention, however, was a small *genre* canvas in a faded gold frame. It showed a nude woman sitting relaxed on the edge of a model-throne, staring at a wide studio-window drenched with rain. She stared out through the grey light listlessly, disconsolately, lazily. There was *ennui* in the thick-shouldered figure with its meditative eyes and its over-burdening mass of dark hair, the momentary lassitude of a body so vital that it carried a touch of animality.

But what brought Storrow up short was its quick power to recall another and a quite different scene, the scene of a half-clad figure sitting abstractedly on a fire-escape slowly winding up the selfsame mass of dark hair with the selfsame milky white fingers.

"Who did this?" he asked. He tried to speak casually. But he could feel his pulses quicken. He was possessed of a faint sinking feeling somewhere under his breastbone.

"That's one of Vibbard's," his host said, standing close behind him. "He called it *A Rainy Morning.*"

"Alan Vibbard's?"

Hardy nodded. "That's the sort of thing he could do to perfection. It's a sort of great-grandchild of Manet's *Breakfast On The Grass.*"

Storrow was more and more disturbed by the aura of reminiscence about the white-fleshed figure on the canvas. It brought to him a sense of betrayal which he found it impossible to define. A vague impression of shame mingled with his curiosity as he studied it still more closely.

"It's unhealthy," he commented aloud.

"That's what Vibbard meant it to be," retorted Hardy. "But Vibbard loves flesh so much that he lost his sermon in the joy of painting it."

"Well, it's a joy I can't share in."

"But you can at least see the unhealthiness isn't in the girl," argued the older man. "It's in the artist."

"I don't happen to know the artist."

"But I do. And I can understand how that jaded hedonist from Harlem responded to trumpeting youth like this. It caught Rodin the same way, in his old age. It makes the thing a human document. That's one reason why I'm rather fond of it."

"But where'd he get the woman?" demanded Storrow, with his heart in his mouth. He compelled himself to turn away, as he spoke, with a parade of indifference.

"Model, I suppose," admitted Hardy as he pointed out a row of silver birches by Metcalf. If he noticed his visitor's preoccupation he gave no further sign of it. Nor did he comment on the fact that Storrow, as he took his departure, after an abstracted inspection of the Wolf Thompson drawings, stopped once more before the Vibbard canvas in the faded gold frame. Yet he saw, or thought he saw, what was almost a stricken look in the studious blue eyes of the younger man.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

STORROW found contact with Hardy to be both stimulating and disquieting. He honoured that older man for his accomplishments and he liked him for his frank spirit of friendliness. But he left that older man's presence carrying with him an undefined and accordingly an incontestable impression of his own callow and inexperienced youth. He was a beginner, without standing, with everything still to do. Hardy was right; New York was made for workers. He remembered the novelist's repeated advice to "organize," even for a life of art. For organization eliminated waste, and artists, above all, were apt to be wasters. Storrow, however, had no intention of being what Hardy had called "a studio lizard." The hunger for power was strong in his vigorous young body. He already was old enough at the game to know that triumph came through toil, and toil alone. He had lost his earlier illusions as to any miraculous accession to fame. That was a matter for romance alone. He was willing enough to knuckle down. He was in the midst of workers, and he was glad to be one of them. It made him forget his loneliness. It kept him from remembering what he told himself he must not remember.

Hardy, a week later, found him deep in his modelling, serious-eyed and smudged with wet clay. The Canadian was glad to see the older man, to explain his work, even to ask the other's advice. But Hardy's eyes, if still kindly, remained unparticipating. Storrow was forced to the conclusion that his new-found friend was not in sympa-

thy with his work. So, ill-at-ease, he talked of other and lighter things. It was not, in fact, until Hardy rose to go that they seemed to reach solid ground again.

"I think I can see what you're trying to reach here," the novelist said as he paused before Storrow's half-finished modelling of a she-bear standing on guard over her cubs. "But aren't you going the wrong way about it?"

"Is there any other way?" demanded Storrow, already depressed by a suspicion of wasted effort. He felt the need for guidance, felt it keenly and continually, yet he nursed the instinctive distaste of the solitary worker for the criticism of others.

"That's something I've been wondering about," acknowledged Hardy with his capitulating smile. "I've been wondering if this turn of yours towards sculpture isn't more of an accident than you imagine. Take these animal groups you've done, for instance! They're more episodic than they are statuesque. They're more dramatic than they are plastic. It seems to me that all along you've really been trying to tell a story. Look at your *Last Of The Pack* there! That's almost pure narrative. I should think you could have expressed all that in a written story about a wolf, and had a freer swing with your material."

"But when I've tried to write, it's always been a failure."

"By no means. You've been trying to write in clay here, and they're not altogether failures. You've been trying to tell a story without knowing it."

"The wild-life stuff has to be a story," argued Storrow.

"Deming doesn't make it that."

"Deming worked more with the Indian than with animals."

"But you've picked the hardest medium in the world to tell your story," contended Hardy. "And now I think of it, why did you pick the wild life stuff?"

"It was what I happened to be thrown up against," explained the younger man. He told, somewhat reluctantly, of the order for the Tecumseh statue.

"I've heard Modrynski talk about those mortuary-urn committees," retorted Hardy. "They regard the nude as indecent and get their art-ideas from mausoleum tablets. They'll only break your heart, my boy. And there's no hope in that type of work. It deals with the dead, and not with life. And you'll want life. And the more knowledge of life you gather up the more you'll ache to interpret it and organize it. The more you see the light the more you'll want to pass on the torch. And what chance will mere modelling ever give you?"

Storrow felt, for a moment, that his new friend was cutting the ground from under his feet. And his helplessness was increased by the discovery that he was listening to certain doubts of his own which he had always been half-afraid to articulate.

"But haven't you ever wanted to write?" demanded Hardy. "Haven't you felt a story in your system, a story that kept trying to get itself into words?"

"Just one," acknowledged the young artist, without enthusiasm.

"What was it?"

Storrow hesitated. But the air of cool capability about Hardy, the light of earnestness in the already slightly faded eyes, gave him the courage to go on.

"I always wanted to write the story of a man and a woman thrown empty-handed into the wilderness, tossed through some trick of fate into our northern Barren Grounds, for instance, as naked as Adam and Eve turned out of the Garden!"

"And survive?" asked Hardy, a trifle breathlessly.

"Yes, survive."

"But how?"

"By human wit, or wood-craft, or whatever you want to call it," was the answer.

"Great!" cried Hardy. "Do it! But, why the North?"

"Because the North's the only country I know well enough for the work."

"That's right," admitted the older man after a moment of meditation. "And the North is new. It would be a change from the over-worked tropical-island setting. That side of it's been done to death, and is mostly moonshine, any way."

"But I don't even know how to approach the thing," explained Storrow. "I've got notes enough, and ideas enough, but I wouldn't know how to handle them."

"Organize!" shouted Hardy, falling back on his favourite word again. "And if you get really stuck, send for me. For I'm more interested in that man and woman of yours than in these menagerie things. And you'll find most of the world ready to back me up in this!"

Storrow was still deep in thought, turning the vanished Hardy's advice over and over in his somewhat bewildered mind, when a knock sounded on his door. He answered that summons abstractedly, listlessly. He was still disturbed by the sudden evaporation of some earlier ardour, still depressed by the consciousness, always heavy to the heart of youth, that his calling in life had been tossed on the balance of wisdom and found wanting.

"Do you use models?" demanded a demure young voice from the twilight of his door-entry. Storrow's searching eyes made out a mouse-coloured figure in a mouse-coloured hat, a spare and sinewy figure with insolent eyes and laughter about the heavily rouged lips.

"Come in," he said. But as she rustled past him into the studio with her high heels clicking on the wooden floor, his courage suddenly failed him. "If you leave your name and number, I can 'phone you, I suppose?"

She nodded, with her audacious young eyes studying his face. He reached for a pencil and scratch-pad, carelessly, to mask his embarrassment.

"Pannie Atwill, at *The Alwyn Arms,*" said the girl in the mouse-coloured hat.

He looked up slowly. The name came back to him, sharp as a pistol-shot. The smiling rouged lips seemed to be enjoying his discomfiture.

"Where's Torrie?" he suddenly asked, in a constrained voice.

"Torrie Throssel?"

Storrow hesitated, puzzled as to the source of her quiet laughter. It was the first time he had ever heard the other woman's name. It struck him as a lyric sort of name. That, he supposed, was why it brought a sudden sense of singing in his veins.

"Yes," he replied at a venture, seeing himself still studied by the half-amused eyes.

"Didn't you know?" demanded the mouse-coloured visitor.

"Know what?"

"That she's living next door to you now?"

A wave of apprehension through which needled wayward currents of something dangerously close to rapture swept over him.

"But that's Alan Vibbard's studio," he continued, not altogether conscious of what he was saying.

"He gave her the use of it until he gets back from Paris," Pannie Atwill announced, with a shrug.

"How long has she been there?" Storrow demanded, with his pulses pounding in spite of himself. He had remembered the door under the imitation Gobelin and again the wave of mingled triumph and apprehension submerged him.

"For two days," he was told.

"Then she doesn't know I'm here?" demanded Storrow, altogether unconscious of the egotism in that question.

"Search me," parried the girl, with her repeated laugh of cool amusement. The smile went out of her face as

she stood studying his preoccupied eyes. She sighed, without quite knowing it. Then she turned towards the still open door.

"Call me up when you want me," she said over her shoulder. And she closed the door as she went out, leaving Storrow standing stock-still in the centre of his studio.

All day long, in fact, he found himself stopping in his work to listen for sounds from the neighbouring room. He found it impossible to accomplish anything in that mood. He could not keep his thoughts on the sketch before him, for five minutes at a time. He could not even remember the once clearly defined end he was trying to reach. And it began to impress him as a very foolish business, this puddling in wet mud and making little animals out of clay. Hardy had been right. There was a limit to what one could express in such a medium. It was too confined, too cramping. Then Storrow stopped short, listening intently, wondering at the faint and mouse-like movement which fell on his ears from the studio just beyond the wall, the studio which in some inexplicable manner had added depth and perspective and mystery to what had once seemed nothing but a blank plane of plaster and lath.

His heart jumped up into his throat, an hour later, when he heard a sudden knock on his door. It proved to be nothing more than a delivery-boy with a supply of groceries for his depleted kitchenette. Once he was alone again he fell to walking his floor, thinly troubled in spirit, listening without quite knowing it for every sound in his immediate neighbourhood. He heard the distant growl of thunder in the south-east and realized from a glance out of his windows that a storm was about to break over the city. Those repeated challenging rolls of thunder were too much for him. He had the love of the hill-top wanderer for wind and rain. So he unearthed a faded raincoat, closed his windows and caught up his hat. Then he made for the street.

He was half-way down the second flight of stairs before he remembered his open skylight. The storm had broken by this time and he could hear the rattle of the heavy drops on roof and window-glass. His studio was already so dark that he was forced to switch on his lights before he could manœuvre the crank and ratchet which lowered the hinged sky-light frame. The rain was beating so heavily against the glass by this time that he stopped to stare at it. A model-throne, pushed close in against one of the windows, made his thoughts flash back to Alan Vibbard's canvas in the faded gold frame, to the white-fleshed woman staring so listlessly out at just such another torrent of falling rain. It brought a spear-head of anguish through his breast; he scarcely knew why. It prompted him to swing about and make for the still open door, hungrier than ever for the huge sanities of wind and air. He had almost reached this door when he was arrested by a low and liquid bubbling of laughter.

"*Look* at me!" cried the careless and contralto-noted voice of a girl from the gloomy hallway.

Storrow looked. He saw Torrie Throssel framed by his doorway, almost as a picture is framed, holding the folds of her wet skirt wide from her hips. Water dripped from her skirt-edge, and under one arm of her thin waist, now translucent with rain, she held what was clearly a ruined hat. Her hair, beaten flat by the rain, streaked across the milky brow now puckered with its half-interrogative laughter.

"You're soaking!" said Storrow, staring again at the translucent wet waist where the texture, flat and fine-wrinkled, made him think of a bas-relief by St. Gaudens.

"I did it on purpose," acknowledged Torrie, almost joyfully. "I love it. I saw it coming and waited for it. Hear my shoes *squash!*" she cried as she walked across the studio floor with exaggerated strides.

He was conscious of the ironic commonplaceness of their speech. He was equally conscious of quickened

pulses and an indeterminate dread smothered under a wider sweep of desire. If she in any way shared in his embarrassment she gave no sign of it. There was something stabilizing, in fact, in her careless lightheartedness. It gave Storrow the courage, at last, to face the predicament before him.

"How did you get here?" he almost bluntly demanded, nodding without knowing it toward the wall with the communicating-door.

Her smile vanished.

"I followed you," she retorted, quite simply.

"Followed me?" he echoed, with his eyes on hers. He saw the reckless light on her face. It infected him with an answering recklessness which he found hard to control. But there should be no more surrenders, he admonished himself, to the easy tides of impulse.

She must have perceived that involuntary hardening of his face, for she came closer to him, slowly, until her groping fingers, as she studied his eyes, were able to catch at the edge of his coat.

"You didn't think you could do what you did, and then drop me like — like a squeezed orange, did you?"

"I wanted to do what was right," he said with unimaginative honesty.

"But was it right?" she asked, clinging to his sleeve. That mood of humility was something quite new in her. "What happened up there in *The Alwyn Arms* had never happened to me before." She lowered her head, so he could no longer see her face, as her fingers clung childishly to one of the buttons on his sleeve. "And I thought — I thought you would come back."

He could smell her hair, damp and heavy. He was impressed by the discovery that she must be without personal vanity, standing before him wet and bedraggled, beaten down like a pelted flower-bed, and quite unconscious of her appearance. The back-thrown shoulders gave a sense of solidity to the torso which the wet drapery

accentuated more than it concealed. There was appeal, too, in the lines of passive vigour under that flattened wet waist, in the humid eyes, in the lips slightly heavy with their parted indecision.

But Storrow became less conscious of the questioning red lips than of the words they had so recently uttered. A dark joy had surged through him, the joy of acquisition, of possession. He had been the only one. He had been jealous of a painted figure on canvas, conjecturing along avenues of intimacy which never existed. He had made himself miserable for nothing. Then the joy quite as suddenly surged out of him again, leaving in its wake a darker reaction of remorse. He had been the only one. And that meant that on him must lie all the weight of their wrong-doing. On him was to be placed all the blame. Without quite knowing what he had been doing, he had, in all probability, broken her life.

He looked down at her, conscious still again of her womanly fragilities, of weaknesses which made her perilous. Passion, he remembered, was cruel. It could be as unconsidering as the beak of an eagle. He was swept by an impression of having been hugely unjust to her. He could not fight down the feeling that he had done her a great wrong, a wrong which in some way must be expiated.

She misread that look of compassion in his eyes.

"You're not sorry, are you?" she asked. She remembered, as she spoke, that the studio door still stood open. Rather than cross the room to close it, she fell back several steps, drawing Storrow with her, until she stood beside the light-switch. She was still studying the man's face as she lifted up a finger and pressed the switch-button.

"Beloved," she said in the dusk, breathing heavily, "you wouldn't leave me, would you?"

Her voice, incredibly timorous, scarcely rose above the rattle of the rain on roof and skylight. He did not

answer her. She stood quiescent, apparently awaiting some movement from him. But Storrow found something deferring that movement, strong as was the propulsion to make it. He was afraid of her, and doubly afraid of her in her moments of meekness.

"Why did you ever come here?" he demanded of her, almost harshly, and at the same time almost hopelessly.

She remained silent a moment or two.

"I didn't intend you to know, until later," she finally admitted. She reached for his hand, and took it in hers. That hand of his, she found, was as cold as ice. Then she sighed, almost contentedly, as though there was something reassuring to be wrung from this discovery. "What are you worrying about?" she demanded.

"About you," he said, staring down at her in the uncertain light.

She looked ruinous in her wet and bedraggled clothing. She would look like that, perhaps, in years to come, broken and sodden and grown unlovely to the eye.

His involuntary movement of withdrawal did not altogether escape her notice.

She laughed sharply, almost triumphantly. She slipped away from him, feeling along the wall for the light-switch. Then she crossed the re-lighted studio to the door and quietly closed it. Having done that, she turned and stood regarding him with studious eyes.

"Listen to me," she said with a matter-of-factness which surprised him. "I don't want you ever to worry about me. If there's any worrying to be done, I can do it. But there isn't any need for it, and there won't be any need for it."

His questioning eyes were still on her as she stepped back to his side. He noticed that the floor was pooled with the drip of water where she had been standing. He could hear the monotonous beat of rain against window-glass. It seemed to isolate them, to leave them in a world by themselves.

"All I want now is to be near you," she said.

A tremor sped through him, a tremor which he could not control. She picked up her wet hat and turned it meditatively about in her hand, apparently waiting for him to speak. But he neither spoke nor moved.

She turned slowly away from him, with a slight frown of disappointment on her face. Her retreat, trivial as it was, filled Storrow with a sudden sense of deprivation. He was prompted to follow her, to accept her claim that they could be happy, gloriously happy, if they only chose to be. But some ghostly hand of instinct held him back.

He watched her as she came to a stop beside the window, down which the rain was beating in steady runnels. He saw her move disconsolately back against the edge of the model-throne and settle there, like a wet pigeon on a fountain-rim, while she stared wistfully out through the rain-darkened window.

A stab of pain went through him as he beheld her there, with her moist skirt flattened against the line of the limbs. Both her pose and her expression reminded him too sharply of the Vibbard picture. It sickened and angered him. It brought to a head a dozen unformulated suspicions.

"Why are you in that man Vibbard's studio?" he found himself demanding.

She turned her head, without moving her body. She was much cooler about it than he had expected.

"So *that's* what's been worrying you!" she said with a laugh. It struck Storrow as being almost a laugh of relief. There was, at any rate, a trace of scorn in it. She turned back, and fell to staring out the window once more. "We are being childish, after all," she finally said with a sigh.

"It doesn't strike me as altogether childish," announced the unhappy young man confronting her.

She turned and faced him, almost forbearingly.

"I'm in Alan Vibbard's studio because he told me last

April I could have the use of it if I wanted it. He's somewhere in Europe for the summer. But I didn't want it. I didn't want it, at least, until I knew *you* were here next door to it. So *you* are really the reason why I'm in that studio, if you insist on knowing!"

"You must have known Vibbard pretty well," he said with his apparently heavy intent to hurt her.

"He has hundreds of friends in this city," was her careless-noted retort.

"But he can't lend studios to all of them," was Storrow's harsh counter retort.

"He's big-hearted. And also big-minded!"

"I suppose that implies that I'm small?" demanded the other, out of his misery.

"Your insinuation is. But I knew Alan Vibbard for three years, or nearly three years, and in all that time he never said one questionable word to me. And I hadn't known you three hours before —"

"I thought we weren't going back over that," called out the stricken-eyed Storrow.

"Then why do you say things that make me go back to it?" she countered. As he moved closer to the wall, so as to face her, the similarity of her posture to that of the figure in the Vibbard canvas became more startling, more disturbing. He felt the need of unburdening his soul of its entire unsavoury weight.

"Because I know you posed for Vibbard," he told her, with a tremor in his voice.

"*I* posed for Vibbard?" she repeated, turning sharply about.

"Yes."

"And when did this happen?" she demanded. He rejoiced inwardly that she was able to smile.

"I don't know."

"Then how did it happen?"

"I don't know," he repeated.

"Then why do you say such absurd things?"

"Because I saw the painting," he replied. But he spoke with less assurance now. She was able to laugh outright at this.

"And what did that prove?" she interrogated, almost humorously.

"I — I thought it was you," he told her.

"But I'm not a model," she protested. The smile went out of her face. "What *was* that picture?" she demanded.

"It was a nude," he compelled himself to admit.

"And you thought that of me?" she challenged. Her eyes, darkened with anger, were full on his face.

"I didn't want to believe it," he truthfully enough acknowledged.

"But why should you?"

He intended to be, he wanted to be, honest with her above all things.

"Because the figure struck me as being amazingly like yours," he told her, doing his best to meet the scorn in her eyes. She was able to laugh again. But it was not a happy laugh.

"You had the advantage, of course, of being able to compare them," she shot out at him. He made a movement of protest, but she began to speak again, more tempestuously. "Even if you *had* that advantage, doesn't it strike you as being rather absurd, pinning an artist's painting on me? It wasn't a photograph. And they don't paint portraits like that, as far as I know. And I don't pose for artists, whether they're my friends or my enemies. And if I did, I'd prefer doing it in clothes."

"That's what puzzled me," protested Storrow. "I felt all along that —"

She stopped him with a gesture that was almost imperious.

"Just what *was* that picture?" she demanded. "What was it like? What did the lady happen to be doing at the time?"

"It's not easy to describe a picture in words," he protested.

"Then sketch it for me," she quietly commanded.

He hesitated for a moment, swept by a feeling that the subject had already been sufficiently threshed out. Then a craving to explore deeper into that murky cave prompted him to reach for his sketching-block.

"Sit back where you were before," he told her, already in his isolating upper strata of the creative vision.

She returned to the edge of the model-throne. There, without question or protest, she sat down, facing him.

"Don't look at me — look out the window," he commanded. She made a *moue* at his solemnity, but it escaped him, for he was already at work with his flying bit of charcoal. His genius for line was quick to assert itself. He caught the contours which the flattened wet clothing only partly concealed. With his quick net-work of running strokes he re-enacted the ancient miracle of conjuring form out of flatness, of capturing on paper an image which spelt completeness in itself. It was not until he had finished the figure and stood staring impersonally at the half-shadowed face of the woman herself that he became thinly conscious of her sheer beauty of throat and neck and brow. That was something he had almost forgotten about. But the face, he concluded, was not important.

"Finished yet?" asked Torrie, almost impatiently.

Instead of answering her, he handed over the sketch in silence. He did so with an absurdly exaggerated idea of the latent drama in the situation, as though vast issues were to be decided in one way or the other. He even held his breath as the girl took the drawing in her hand, the drawing, which after some mysterious fashion, was to convict her of guilt or of innocence.

His searching eyes, however, found no corresponding gravity on her face. She merely laughed as she glanced down at the sketch.

"That's *clever,*" she carelessly acknowledged, handing it back to him. "But I can't see that it means anything."

He looked down at the drawing, and then, with a shoulder-movement of impatience, tossed it aside.

"You foolish, foolish boy," said Torrie's voice, quite close to him, in a coo as quiet as a ring-dove's. The pendulum of his emotion, having achieved its full swing towards misery, was already moving in an opposite direction.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, conscious of what was almost condescension in her smile.

"Because I'm glad you can pay me the compliment of being jealous of me," she told him. "And since you care that much, you can kiss me if you want to."

She stood in a mock-submissive attitude, with her heels together and her hands behind her back. He noticed the blue shadows about the half-lowered lids of her eyes and certain minute spasmodic movements of her slightly upraised chin. He noticed, too, the full column of the white throat, the characteristic milky whiteness of the skin where the line of the neck flowed into the plane of the thick-set shoulder, the heavy redness of the slightly parted lips. It agitated him, and even in his agitation he was able to resent the fact that she had in some way obtained control of his pulse-beat. Should she become conscious of that fact, he forlornly remembered, he would be helpless before her.

"I thought that was over with," he weakly contended.

"*Chasta Joseppha!*" she whispered, without moving. The allusion, however, was lost on him. She still stood with her face upturned and her hands behind her back. But slowly the relaxed lines about the half-smiling lips settled into hardness. The eyes shadowed by the thick lashes became less ruminative, less unfocussed, with an alert and narrowing light in their misty hazel. It was not until she had taken a deep breath, and as slowly expelled it, that she was able to laugh again.

"You're right," she said with the faintest *vibrata* of feeling still in her voice. "We'd only make a muddle of things, I suppose, and there'll soon be enough to worry about, without that!"

"What will you have to worry about?" he demanded, promptly apprehensive.

"Work!" she trilled with an effort at gaiety.

"What work?" he asked.

"The new part that Krassler's just given me. Yes, Hermie's eaten crow and ladled out a real part in his *Seventh Wave*. It's forty-eight sides. He keeps saying it's the chance of a life-time. But I get chills down the spine when I think of jumping into a straight part like that and being billed next to a woman like Catherine Klennert."

Storrow, whose grasp of the situation was not a complete one, stood watching Torrie as for the second time she picked up her sodden hat.

"But you're not going to let anything come between you and your chance, are you?" he demanded, breathing freer in this less intimate atmosphere of action.

"*You're* the only thing that could come between me and that chance," she retorted in a flash of candour.

"But I don't intend to," he said with an ardour and promptness which in no way added to her happiness. Her smile, in fact, was rather a wintry one. But it was a smile.

"So while you're working away on your side of this old wall," she told him as she stood patting the faded paper, "I'll be studying away on my side of it. And that will be something, after all."

He made an effort to impress on her that it would be everything, but the ruminative hazel eyes were listless as she listened to him. She apparently failed to see, as he did, something brave and brilliant in their projected program of resolute defiance to impulse. They would work side by side, he explained, intent on their own ends, and

with all their work they were going to remain the best of friends. "Isn't that true?" he demanded.

"I suppose so," she retorted.

"Then shake on it," he said.

They shook hands, solemnly. She sighed for the second time as she turned towards the door.

"Now I've got to get these wet duds off," she said in a tired voice as she stepped out across the threshold.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

STORROW, during the preoccupied days that followed, did his best to argue himself into that contentment of mind which is supposed to flower out of evil overcome and temptation defied. But he was conscious, all the while, of a vague unrest, of a sense of suspended action. His ear was repeatedly assailed by the intimate small noises of Torrie Throssel's activities, the snap of a light-switch on their common wall, the tinkling of a telephone call-bell, even the partition-filtered sounds of her splashing body in its bath. He had heard her preoccupied whistling of a current song-hit, in no way disturbed by the flatness of the notes. Later on, he caught the sound of a piano being opened and the keys being tested. Then she had played, badly but noisily, a march-song new to Broadway.

He became aware, the next day, that she had callers. He never failed to hear the thump of the heavy antique knocker affixed to the Vibbard doors, echoing like an anvil-clang along the dusty hallway. Some of these visits were contentious, and one at least was boisterous, accompanied by fusillades of rag-time from the piano. Storrow, when it was over, thought he heard Pannie Atwill's voice amid those of a departing trio. But he could not be sure of this, and he compelled himself nevertheless to go on with his modelling, more intent than ever on his work. Yet his sense of deprivation deepened into one of loneliness. Late that night he went to his wide back-window and stared out at the golden mist that hung over the moonlit city, softening even the barrier of brick and mortar ramparting so crazily across his northern sky-line.

"Hello, honey!" softly fluted a voice not more than six feet away from him. He turned and saw Torrie in the next window, with the faded rose kimono thrown over her white night-dress.

"You're not in bed yet?" he called back in a half-whisper, thrilling in spite of himself as he saw the dark cloud of her loosened hair falling about the familiar blur of old rose.

"No, but I'm going now," she said with her little wood-pigeon coo of laughter. His heart sank. As he leaned out across the dusty sill, shot through with a still keener sense of deprivation, he saw her slowly lower her sash and draw back into the unlighted room. He sat there for a long time, looking out at the city. Then he went listlessly to bed.

He was far from sorry, the next morning, to find Hardy invading his studio. The older man inspected the modelling still half-swathed in its moistened cheese-cloth, shook his head, and asked when Storrow was going to start in at real work.

"Sooner than you expect," Storrow surprised him by asserting.

"Good!" announced Hardy, sitting down beside the other's littered work-table. He absently reached out and took up an oblong of card-board lying there. He bent over it in a study of such prolonged silence that Storrow turned and stared at him.

"You at least have a wonderful memory," commented Hardy as he put down the sheet again. Storrow could see that it was his charcoal drawing of Torrie leaning against the model-throne.

"Yes, that thing stuck in my craw," explained the younger man as he took up the drawing. He tore it slowly to pieces, without so much as looking at it. Then he tossed it into his waste-paper basket.

"And so you took that way of working it out of your

system?" demanded the other, with a head-movement towards the basket.

Storrow nodded, without meeting the other man's gaze.

"There's something else I wish you'd work out of your system as successfully as that," Hardy remarked through his meditative cigarette-smoke.

"What?" queried Storrow, making ready to resent any too casual intrusion on his privacy of life.

"That north woods story of yours," was the somewhat unexpected reply. Whereupon the younger man, vaguely relieved, retorted that he intended to give up puddling for the pen, at the end of the week.

Hardy, at this acidulated yet half-laughing confession, acquired an unlooked-for air of sobriety.

"I suppose it's none of my business, in a way," he finally ventured. "But it might help if I knew just how you were situated. Do you have to live on what your work brings in, I mean, or can you afford to be independent?"

"I've enough to keep the wolf from the door," explained Storrow with a laugh, "but not enough to keep him entirely off the range."

"Well, that's more important than you'll ever imagine," commented the other. "And since you're going to settle down, supposing we see a bit of this city before the work gets its grip on you." He mentioned a possible luncheon at the Salmagundi Club, and the opening smoker of the Kit-Kats, a glimpse at some pictures of Hawthorne's, and a costume ball which Brownie Tell, the portrait-painter down in the Square, was about to give. "It's all grist for the mill," he explained. And Storrow, seeing in this an escape from his mood of inertia, was glad enough to catch at the chance of shaking the dust off his soul. When that was done he would settle down to work, to work that would mean something.

Hardy, on his own part, was conscious of no sacrifice while taking in tow this newcomer to his city. The older

man, who had journeyed full swing about the circle of experience, found a slightly jaded curiosity revitalized by the other's freshness of outlook. He even found Storrow's reactions awakening dormant susceptibilities in his own breast. Yet when rehearsals of Hardy's play were resumed, with a new cast, Storrow seemed more interested in the physical aspects of the excursion than in the nature of the drama itself. It was the cavernous and half-lit stage, the empty house, the self-hypnosis of actors intent on achieving a certain end, the accidental pictorial values of faces seen in strong side-lights, which proved the more appealing to the young sculptor. But this young sculptor, Hardy soon realized, had reserves and reticences which it would be necessary to respect. He carried himself credibly through the tea-hour of those sedater homes which the summer-end found already open to the peripatetic man of letters, and he was quietly appreciative when the talk went back to the older man's days in Paris and Munich and Rome.

It was a pleasant enough task for Hardy, this appeasing of a leonine young appetite with the rib-bones of his own past. It was not long, too, before his attachment to Storrow became a less impersonal one. Less impersonal, also, became his speculations as to what a city like New York would do to the Wild Man Of The Mountain, as he sometimes half-humorously called Storrow. He nursed no envy for the younger man and his type. They messed things up, as a rule, and burned themselves out before their time. It was the colder men, the harder men, who manœuvred life into success. Yet Storrow, Hardy felt, had an incongruous streak of the covenanter in his make-up. That, possibly, would serve to leave him more preyed upon than preying. But, on the whole, Hardy concluded, he was a man it would be profitable to watch, for his own sake as well as the other's.

If Storrow was in any way conscious of this double-edged surveillance, he kept his secret to himself. As a

sculptor, he felt, he was already ridiculous in the eyes of Hardy. He had no intention of appearing ridiculous before him as a man. No word of Vibbard's studio or its occupant escaped him, much as his thoughts still centred about them. But a day or two later these same thoughts wandered more than ever in that direction, for as he stepped into his room at the end of the afternoon, Storrow heard the sound of a piano from the other side of the wall. He knew, after listening a moment, that it was somebody playing *"Kennst du das Land?"* And he also knew that this *Mignon* song had been a favourite of his mother's, and, what was more, was being played by a hand much too masterly to belong to Torrie Throssel. It moved him, as he stood there intently listening, more than he had imagined any music could do. Then came a fragment of a Chopin *nocturne,* played aimlessly and between broken scraps of talk, then another song, familiar to him from his youth, a song he had always looked upon as one of the loveliest in the world.

*"Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment;*
*Chagrin d'amour dour toute la vie" . . .*

In strange contrast to the beauty of the accompaniment he heard a man's voice, broken, quavering, timberless, attempting in vain to follow the melting chords as a crippled beggar might hobble after a gliding bird. It impressed the listener as being the voice of a very old man. Yet Storrow, oddly stirred, crossed to his window and threw it open. He could hear the wheezy and asthmatic voice plainer than ever, sustained and almost redeemed by the pellucid notes of the piano.

The next instant there was a sharp knock on the door. Storrow, still perplexed, slowly crossed the room.

He found Torrie there, with a small frown of anxiety wrinkling her forehead.

"Modrynski 's here," she said, visibly excited. Stor-

row did not respond to this statement, apparently, as she had expected him to do.

"He could help you tremendously," she explained. "We knocked, an hour ago, but you weren't in. That's him in my studio, playing Schubert."

"And singing?" demanded Storrow, not concealing his scorn.

The girl nodded. "It's awful, isn't it? The poor old fellow has softening of the brain, or something worse. At least they say so. But he still has more art in his little finger than most men have in their whole head. I'd like him to see what you've done."

"But he wouldn't be interested in animals," laughed Storrow, to whom the name of Modrynski had once spelled magic.

"He's one of the three greatest sculptors in America," persisted Torrie with studied patience, "and I hate to think of you missing the chance of a life-time."

Storrow could not altogether disagree with her. Yet he stood studying her face. It has lost its passiveness and seemed narrower and more alert than he had imagined it to be. Excitement, for some reason, had given her a splash of colour on either cheek, and there was less of the rebel-look in the habitually meditative eyes.

"Shall I go in with you?" he asked.

"No, stay here. I'll bring Modrynski in. That'll make it easier to get him started on sculpture. But don't let anything he says offend you. He's like a child, remember."

They were longer in getting to his door than Storrow expected. And when Torrie appeared, leading Modrynski by the arm through the uncertain light of the hall, a faint chill fluttered through Storrow's startled body. That serious-eyed girl, radiating a vitality which she found hard to repress to the laggard movement of the man beside her, made Storrow's mind flash back to an old print of Antigone leading a blinded Œdipus. For he

saw a fumbling and doddering old man who walked with difficulty, as though the will and the worn-out body were no longer in co-ordination, a very lean and tall old man with a narrow, high forehead and the beak of an eagle. A sparse nimbus of hair failed to conceal the skull, as shining and yellow as polished ivory, across which it was so laboriously trained in thin streaks made docile by oil. The skin of the face itself was cheese-colour, marked with darker patches of scurfy brown, and everything about that face seemed pendulous, from the nephritic sacs under the eyes to the drooping cheek-flaps and the saggy dewlap under the slightly tremulous chin. Yet an effort had been made to conceal the scrawny throat behind a foolishly high and imprisoning starched collar. The tall and decrepid body, too, was arrayed in the dandified apparel of an earlier mode, a tight-fitting cutaway coat with a gardenia in the button-hole, pointed shoes with pearl-coloured gaiters, a coloured Parisian waist-coat across which dangled a gold-rimmed monocle on a black silk ribbon.

It was not until his visitor was well in the room and Modrynski's heavily-veined and slightly tremulous hand was screwing this monocle in between the eagle beak and the shaggy brow that Storrow noticed the old artist's eyes. There and there alone the hand of Time had been stayed. They remained, by some accident of organic repair, the eyes of youth. From behind them Intelligence looked out, as from a ruined tower. They seemed to mock the senile mask of the body through which they peered. And their still half-humorous alertness, their full-irised ironic power of penetration, left the younger man vaguely but unmistakably apprehensive.

"Ah, this is the boy from the land of the caribou!" cackled the broken old voice. The flaccid lips, slightly moist at one corner with saliva, were pursed up critically as the bony and shaking fingers held the monocle poised. Storrow, at the moment, was forcing himself to remember what this sodden and worn-out hulk of a man had ac-

complished in his time, what dreams he had sought and found, what beauty he had released from marble. Torrie, making no effort to hide her laughter, was repeating the younger man's name to the older, slowly and deliberately, as though she were talking to a small child.

Modrynski dropped his monocle. Then he let one tremulous hand rest on the shoulder of the girl beside him.

"And apparently much more appealing to the eye, my dear, than anything he'll ever chisel out of Tennessee marble!" croaked the old libertine.

"But this work of his is clever," argued Torrie. Modrynski, however, was not to be diverted.

"You young fools," he sighed, as he sank into the chair Storrow placed for him, "you never know what youth is worth until you lose it!" And he sat there, blinking like a captured eagle, mumbling over and over: "Youth — delicious youth!"

And since Mahomet refused to go to the mountain Torrie brought the mountain to Mahomet. She did so by resolutely taking up Storrow's models and placing them directly in front of the ruminating old sculptor. He sat confronting them, but he paid no attention to them. Storrow even smiled as Torrie crowded them still closer about Modrynski's knees, as one captures the attention of a spoiled child with toys. But Modrynski's mind was fixed on other things.

"So you're the young barbarian who has captured this daughter of beauty," the flaccid lips mumbled. "You and your silly, big, lumbering, thick-muscled, glorious, wild-animal body! And I'll be damned if he hasn't got a head I'd like to model, now I come to think of it. But what's the good? And he's yours, my dear, and I suppose you're his. That's the way of youth. The young must walk with the young. Like appeals to like. Youth calls to youth. And you put a wall between them, but they soon have a hole in the hedge, as my French friends phrase it!"

Storrow stared pityingly at the ruinous façade behind which lurked so much lost knowledge. Then he no longer pitied the aged voluptuary with the gardenia and the pomaded nimbus, for Modrynski had suddenly emerged into a consciousness of the modellings before him. He stiffened, like a soldier confronted by his commanding-officer. The flaccid lines became tense; the weak mouth grew authoritative. And as the aquiline eye made its survey, point by point and line by line, Torrie herself paled a little.

"Aren't they clever?" she prompted.

Modrynski blinked at her. Then he blinked back at the models.

"Clever?" he exploded, "Barye without brains . . . sample of Siwash realism . . . totem-pole technique! No," he mocked in a falsetto of savagery, "this might make a creditable lamp-stand. And those would not be unsuited for lawn ornaments. But where's the beauty, woman, where's the beauty in a mud vivarium? What's it fallen to, this Art we followed if it turns away from the God-given loveliness of man and woman and takes up with rodents and barnyards. It means titmouses for the Metropolitan and the ring-tailed lemur for the Louvre! Clever? Hah! It may be clever, as you call it, but get me away from it before I have to spray myself with flea-powder! Get me safe in my taxi before this mud Zoo springs at my throat and gives me rabies!"

He rose to his feet with an effort, snapping out phrases —"Half-baked little Landseers!"—"going to epicize the jungle"—"put tubes in their mouths and turn 'em into fountains!"

"Modrynski!" cried the girl, with blazing eyes, overwhelmed by the injustice of his outburst. But Modrynski was already headed for the door, with Torrie fruitlessly trying to intercept him. He waved her aside and vanished down the half-lighted hallway, rumbling and coughing and groping his way to the stairs.

Torrie stood motionless, with one hand against her thin shirtwaist. Then she turned and advanced slowly towards Storrow. So tragic was the light in her eyes that Storrow laughed, not altogether happily, but easily and impersonally. The situation, after all, had clarified, clarified at a stroke. Hardy had been right. A master had confirmed his hint. The era of the mud Zoo was over for all time.

"And I thought he'd help you," Torrie mourned, still stunned by the force of that outbreak.

"He *has*," asserted Storrow, not without a touch of bitterness.

There was still pity in the girl's eyes. "How could he?" she demanded.

"By persuading me I'm about finished with this stuff," was the answer. There was a quaver in his voice as he spoke, for no man can contemplate the abandonment of what has been his life-work without a pang of regret. Nor could he, immured in his own emotions as he was, see his way to resent the other's instinctive movement of sympathy as she placed her two hands on his shoulders and turned his face towards the light. In that movement he perceived no hint of appropriation. But before he became aware of it he stood within the aura of her influence, and as she leaned closer with her fingers linked behind his neck and her lips murmuring "I'm sorry — so sorry!" he found, as other men before him have done, that there was anodyne in a woman's touch. He enclosed that leaning figure in the sustaining clasp of his own arms and his face bent closer to the face that was lifted close to his own.

They were startled by a knock on the door. The two relaxed bodies did not shift from where they stood, but a rigidity came into their limbs and the two heads raised and turned, strangely like wild animals that have sniffed danger up-wind. They did not speak, as the knock was

repeated, but Storrow accepted the pressure of the girl's hand on his arm as a command to remain silent.

They were still standing there, with that summons unanswered, when the door was unexpectedly opened. Storrow, at the moment that he backed away, saw a gloved and veiled figure with a wicker hamper suspended from one slender arm. There was a moment of unbroken silence. The air became electric with motion suspended.

"Forgive me for house-breaking," cried the beguiling light voice of Charlotte Kirkner. "But I wanted to surprise you, Owen, with a basket of fruit."

Storrow, flushing to the eyes, advanced slowly and took the wicker hamper from her hand. He saw the quick glance that passed from one woman to the other, the interplay of cold appraisal, the alert hostility behind the screening bocage of indifferency. Charlotte Kirkner, he noticed, did not advance into the room. He was wondering, abashed by the light in her barricaded eyes, just what to say, just how to phrase his speech of introduction. But before he arrived at that end his doorway was darkened by still another figure.

It was Chester Hardy.

"Hello, Storrow," he said as he sauntered in. Then to the former's surprise he just as unceremoniously said "Hello, Torrie," and came to a stop, slightly bewildered by the sustained silence of the circle he had invaded. It was not until he turned about that he saw the face of the girl nearer the door.

"It's Miss Kirkner, of course," he said with his quiet and easy smile. And the next moment they were shaking hands. "You remember how badly I skated last winter at Tuxedo."

"It is nice to see you again," acknowledged the girl, her colour slowly mounting as she moved ever so slightly towards the still open door. "But Owen's busy and I must be off."

Hardy re-inspected the trio, vainly waiting for some word to resolve the situation into translucence.

"In that case we'd better all be off," he announced. "So I'll take you down to that opulent sedan of yours on my way."

He was able to wave his cane lightheartedly as he went. Their voices, high with a coerced hilarity as they descended the stairs, floated brokenly back through the dusty hallway. Storrow crossed the room and closed the door.

"Who is that woman?" demanded Torrie Throssel as Storrow stood with his back to the closed door, staring at her.

"What difference does it make?" he said with rather a reckless laugh.

## CHAPTER NINE

OWEN STORROW'S early training had been the direct antithesis of that bohemianism which clings about the skirts of the metropolitan art-colony. He found it more and more expedient, accordingly, to keep reminding himself that New York was not like the rest of the world as he had known it. It was a riddle which only time and study could decipher. Tangled up with its moments of exaltation were unexpected aspects of degradation, just as anachronistic uglinesses still cropped up in the midst of its material beauties. It was a world by itself, apparently, disorderly, kaleidoscopic, contradictory. But behind its muddle of broken hues and its fortuity of frontal design, Storrow contended, it necessarily harboured some deep-hidden dignity of purpose, some unifying spirit of aspiration. It was the duty of the newcomer, therefore, to stand silent, to suspend judgment, to look deeper and await the final gift of understanding.

Yet the matter of Browning Tell and his costume-ball proved a good deal of a perplexity to the newcomer in question. Storrow had been told that it would be one of the best things of the year, equal to anything he would get in Paris, as good as the Quart' Arts Ball of Ninety-Two, about which the older men still spoke with wistful wags of the head. There would be famous people there, famous artists, famous beauties, authors, actresses, models, musicians, society idlers, and, in all probability, some fancy-dress apparel that would be frankly shocking. Torrie Throssel, he found, had been at such things, and had no intention of going to this one. From the first,

in fact, she spoke contemptuously of Tell and his "stunts," as she called them. He was an impostor and a climber, she claimed, one of the dance-mad Pans of those pre-bellum dance-mad days who depended more on his feet than his hands in the matter of capturing fashionable sitters. And he was a trickster even in his work, claimed his detractor, since he had the habit of placing these sitters behind a framed network of interwoven picture-cord squares and drawing in their figures on canvases carefully blocked out with the same number of squares, which is one way of beating the pantograph, she protested, when you happen to be overbusy taking money away from foolish millionaries.

Chester Hardy, on the other hand, added to Storrow's perplexity by taking a view directly opposite to Torrie's. He insisted that the younger man should be a spectator of that *bal costumé*. And if reason more substantial than the mere quest of amusement induced Hardy to take this stand he at least kept them to himself. He even refused to accept Storrow's revived excuses about being hard at work laying out his North Woods novel. Nor did the claim that it was already too late to have a costume made prove as serviceable as it was intended. Hardy, in fact, gave the Canadian a card to the wife of a tubercular artist who, in that heyday of the dancing mania, considerably augmented the family income by maintaining and renting out a fantastic wardrobe of apparel fashioned for just such ends. So Storrow finally selected a Captain Kidd costume, not because the sash and wig and loose-topped Wellington boots appealed to him, but because the clothing in question happened to fit his somewhat brawny frame.

It was almost midnight when Hardy and his companion made their way to Washington Square in a taxicab. Along the shabbiest side of that Square Storrow beheld a line of landaulets and sedans and limousines which impressed him even more than a heterogeneous and singing

band which was arriving on foot from Greenwich Village. Storrow lost Hardy in the crowd on the narrow stairway strung with Chinese lanterns, which smelt of fur and scented talcum and perspiration. Already, over the crowding heads of Columbines and Mandarins and Marie Antoinettes and Indian Chiefs and Geisha Girls and Jack Tars and Arabs in flowing burnouses, sounded the strains of an orchestra pounding out "rag-time" music.

"Pipe the Howard Pyle poster!" cried an artist-girl in velveteens to her Cave-Man companion with a leopard-skin draped over his shoulder, as she laughed openly into Storrow's slightly abashed eyes.

"Get on to the Otto Cushing guy!" proclaimed still another girl as she laughed back at Storrow from the upper stairway. And Storrow began to feel that his costume was a foolish one.

At the stair-head he found a short and somewhat rotund man in pink "fleshings" and a pale blonde wig, with a gilded Cupid's bow on his arm, riotously receiving his equally riotous guests, most of whom accosted him as "Brownie." And the still solemn-eyed Canadian found it hard to believe that this undignified figure was the Browning Tell who could claim at least three canvases in the Metropolitan and could behold his name week by week on the art-pages of the Sunday papers. But Storrow found himself elbowed and shouldered on into a jungle of palm and evergreen and more Chinese lanterns, where on a large but crowded floor the dancing was already taking place. Beyond this again was another room duly labelled the "Grabeteria," where ices were served by three somewhat startling young *décolletés,* and sandwiches and *boullion* jelly were laid out on an improvised buffet beside three huge barrels of beer mounted on wooden horses. In the centre of the room was a punch-bowl as big as a wash-tub, about which the thirsty dancers were already crowding in noisy and ever-shifting

rows as high-coloured as the rings of Saturn. Already, too, the air was blue with cigarette-smoke, and heavy with the odour of the liquid from the dripping barrel-spigots, of the spilled punch, of floor-dust mingling with axillary exhalations. But never for a moment did the din and music stop.

On the floor above, where a hurdy-gurdy had been hoisted through a front window, Storrow found the dancing to be even more energetic and the spirit of good-fellowship even more elastic. In little man-made bowers along one wall were murmuring couples, unashamed of both their silences and their caresses. On an open corner of the floor a padded policeman was giving an exhibition of the *Matiche* with a dimpled little convict in stripes who held a *papier-mâché* ball-and-chain in her hand as she danced. When the music stopped there was a tidal wave towards the beer and the punch-bowl, a stream of colour and movement, of tinsel and metal and feather and rice-powdered flesh so vari-coloured that it tended to make the eyes ache. Then the hurdy-gurdy struck up above the orchestra on the floor below, the ebb-tide became a flood-tide, and this time the interpolated attraction was a Palette Dance given by two lean and swarthy models from "The Village." These acrobatic and lightly-garbed ladies were attended by two naked negro-boys with clout-cloths about their loins and Indian war-bonnets on their heads, each carrying a spear improvised from a curtain-pole. The Palette Dance was followed by a Dance of the Seven Pails, which proved even more popular than its predecessor but impressed Storrow as being over-lewd in its grotesqueries, prompting him to drift on to other fields. As he moved away a satin slipper, apparently tossed through the air from nowhere, struck the abashed young Captain Kidd on the shoulder. He heard muffled laughter from a darkened arbour and a white hand was thrust through the screening leafage to take possession of his cape. But he eluded

those appropriating fingers and drifted down-stairs again, where he found himself more ill-at-ease than ever.

"Hello, Apollo, why aren't you dancing?" demanded a half-clad nymph in a cheese-cloth tunic spangled with silver, interrupting Storrow in the midst of his morose wandering about.

"I don't know how," acknowledged Storrow, arrested by the high and silvery-sweet tones of her excited young voice.

"But there's no reason you can't learn," declared the girl, capturing him by the edge of his costume. He concluded from that airy and almost sexless immediacy of address, that she was an artist's model.

"In one night?" he asked.

"In ten minutes," retorted the girl, drawing him closer. "Look — let me show you."

It was a time when syncopated music and dance-movements of African origin were at the height of popular favour. There was little that was complex in either the movements or the music, and Storrow surrendered easily enough to that twin appeal of rhythm and sound.

"Try that again," commanded the wisp of a girl so adroitly manœuvring him about the floor. "And hold me closer, kid! I'm not gun-cotton, you know. That's better. Now put some pep into it!"

It was not easy, at first. But the crowding bodies about him masked his mistakes and he was able to master a number of the steps. It surprised him, as he became more expert, to find his earlier repugnance at the spectacle passing away, just as his earlier repugnance for the half-draped girl herself had disappeared. He liked the contact of that firm young body against his. He liked the harmony of movement in their limbs, the pulse of the music, the utter abandonment to motion constituting an end in itself. Hardy hadn't been so far wrong. Dancing, after all, was what kept the world young. Children danced, waves danced, even the leaves of the trees danced.

So why shouldn't men and women? And Storrow, becoming more adept in those rudimentary movements, no longer allowed his partner to guide him, but putting out a strength which easily over-matched hers, fell to piloting the girl in the silver tunic as he felt she ought to be piloted.

"Gee, that's great!" she murmured, surrendering contentedly to his mastery. She relaxed in his clasp, becoming almost passive, permitting him to lift her clear of the floor in certain of their more ecstatic whirlings.

"You'll make some little dancer, kid, after a night or two of this," panted his partner, with a little squeeze of appreciation as they came to a stop when the music ceased. They were both thirsty, so they made their way arm in arm to the punch-bowl, into which their host was putting fresh strawberries and another bottle of *cognac*.

"Give it a kick, Brownie," cried the girl on Storrow's arm as she watched the last of the brandy flow out of the bottle. And the kick was there, Storrow felt, as he drank his second glass of that beguiling concoction, so deceivingly chilled and sweetened. The music started up again, provocative, challenging, almost mystic in its aboriginal monotony of beat. He had been living too long, he felt, on the north side of life.

"I'm next here," announced a fuller-toned voice, and a girl with laughing eyes caught Storrow by the arm.

It was Pannie Atwill. She had been a trained stage dancer and she moved with a quiet and moderated grace which Storrow found easy to follow. The opposition of limbs to limbs, in her case, was more impersonal. Her mind seemed intent on movement alone. Storrow was even conscious of the fact that at the moment he meant nothing to her, beyond being the instrument through which she achieved her deliberated end. It was plain that she preferred dancing, and dancing well, to being mauled. And it began to dawn on Storrow that there was a delight above the carnal delight of physical contact

in such things, that there was the æsthetic pleasure of harmonious sound and step in these preordained movements about a polished floor.

"There's that souse Donnie Eastman," the dancing girl said without a break in her steps. "Don't let him get near me. . . . You're not so rotten as I thought you'd be. . . . But don't walk on the dame, please, just because she's so pie-eyed she has to go down. . . . Now bunt through and get away from the Eastman gink until the music starts again. . . . And go light on that punch or believe me, you'll have a head like a Zep before morning!"

Towards the end of their second dance together Pannie Atwill had become both more silent and more serious of mien.

"Let's beat it up to the roof," she suggested, starting for the open without even waiting for his answer. There, in the darkness, they stumbled upon an occasional couple huddled together. From deeper shadows glowed the tips of lighted cigarettes, and now and then a laughing gasp, or a muffled scream of protest, rose through the gloom. Why it impressed Storrow as being slightly Babylonian he did not stop to question. But he was grateful for the fresh air and the star-strewn spaces above him.

"I want to talk to you," announced the girl as she made room for Storrow on a coping-tile. That, apparently, was the closest they could get to seclusion.

"About what?" asked the other, wondering why the quietness about him should become so suddenly oppressive.

"About Torrie," was Pannie Atwill's altogether unexpected answer, as she fumbled about her stocking-top for what proved to be a small silver box. "She's a good friend of mine, that girl, and I don't want to see her foot slip when she's got the chance of a life-time waiting for her."

"What do you mean by her foot slip?" demanded Storrow, warm and cold at one and the same time.

Pannie did not explain that phrase. Instead, she deftly struck a match on her slipper-heel and lighted a cigarette.

"Torrie's not like my bunch," she continued after slowly exhaling this smoke. "She takes things too serious. She's got a heart as big as a moving-van, and unless it's handled right it's going to get hurt. Just now she's got the chance of a lifetime to make a hit with Krassler."

"With Krassler?" echoed Storrow.

"Yes, if she'll only stick her head in the yoke and let that kike drive her the way she otta be driven, he'll make her into an actress and have her name in electrics inside of a second season. He's pawing the stall-planks to do it. And he *can* do it. But there's just one thing standing between Torrie and her chance."

"What's that?" asked the man in the Captain Kidd make-up.

"It's *you*," retorted the other, and before he could break in with the protest his lips were framing she swept on. "You know as well as I do that Torrie's foolish about you. And I know her better than I do you, and I know she's too big to be broken up for nothing."

"Perhaps," Storrow said with a not altogether successful attempt at dignity, "if you knew me better you'd not foresee that catastrophe quite so imminent!"

"That's what I want to get at," explained the girl, involved in perplexities which were apparently new to her. "A woman as lovely as Torrie Throssel can't go around loose in a rabbit-run like New York without having enough pop-eyed chasers at her heels to turn her head, if she wanted it turned. But Torrie isn't built that way. She's always preferred travelling light and travelling alone. She's never looked twice at a man, as long as I've known her — at least not until she bumped into

you and lost her bearings. Oh, there's no use humping and edging away and getting up-stage over what I'm saying to you. I know what I know. And it's considerable. But the real thing I want to know is, what're you going to do about it?"

The effrontery of that demand rather took Storrow's breath away.

"Isn't that something entirely between Torrie and me?" he asked much more calmly than he had expected.

The girl beside him took another deep inhalation of cigarette-smoke. Then she laughed a little.

"If I thought you were good enough for Torrie, or if she was a girl who could take her own part in a thing like this, I'd most certainly say yes. But you've got to show me!"

It was Storrow's turn to laugh, a barricading but by no means happy laugh.

"What particular form must that demonstration take?" he demanded.

He was conscious of the girl's face being turned closer to his in the darkness.

"It ought to look like what any white man would do under the circumstances," she coolly and quietly averred. She stopped him, the next moment, as he was about to speak. "Man to man," she said, with her hand on his arm, "and straight out, do you honestly care for that girl?"

"And if I don't?" parried Storrow, resenting that his reserves of life should be thus trespassed over and trampled upon.

The girl slipped down off the coping-tiles. As she did so she threw away her cigarette-end and sighed audibly. "If you don't, you ought to break away and amuse yourself with one of that bunch downstairs. It would seem more like a square game!"

"And if I do care?" ventured Storrow. His com-

panion paused at the stair-head, arrested by the solemnity of his voice.

"Oh, in that case," she retorted with an effort at lightness, "I guess I'm merely butting into somebody else's business. But I've said my little say, and here's where I drop out."

She slipped down the narrow stairway into the sea of light and sound and movement. She was lost in the crowd by the time he had followed after her, abstracted-eyed, for he had much to think over. He circled about, aimlessly, to the door of a dimly-lighted cloak-room when he was arrested by a hand on his.

"Honey-boy," murmured the voice in the uncertain light. Storrow turned and looked at a velvety-skinned Lady Pompadour with a painted ivory fan and a rope of pearls about her powdered plump throat.

"What is it?" he coldly inquired.

"Can't you stay and amuse me?" she deliberately challenged, struggling a little over the sibilants.

Storrow stared down at her as she laughed her foolish laugh. Then he meditatively responded to the tug at his sash and sat beside her. He continued to stare at the soft lines of the matronly bosom, at the white and fastidious-looking fingers heavy with rings, at the swollen and slightly parted lips. He even laughed, impersonally, when she pulled the heavy wig from his head and pushed her unsteady fingers through the mat of his hair. Already his reactions to such things were no longer the vivid and acute mental experiences they might have been a few short months ago. He was more directly occupied, in fact, in thinking of what Pannie Atwill had been saying to him. When the woman at his side drew his passive face close to hers he stared into the unnaturally dilated pupils with an impersonal mild pity which she apparently misinterpreted for amorous response. For the next moment her plump bare arms were about him, encompassing

him in a smothering clasp which it took an effort to escape from. Her winey pantings, by this time, had become odious as well as odorous, and he held her at arm's length, staring shamefacedly at the blowzy mouth and the unsteady eyes which were beyond the fathom-line of words. Dazed by that movement of repudiation, she stared back at him, momentarily sobered. Then, seeming at last to comprehend the contempt on his face, she made the ghost of an effort towards drawing herself up, with dignity. But she was not sure of her equilibrium and she staggered as she rose to her feet. Before she had recovered her balance he escaped and turned and strode from the room.

Several weeks later he found out that she was the wife of a well-known architect, a man of position and wealth. She seemed decorous enough in her black fox furs as she stepped into a limousine, after a Fritz-Kreisler recital at Æolian Hall. Their eyes met as the car circled away. He could not tell, from her expression, whether or not she had remembered his face. But he wondered, in his bewilderment, which of those two sides was her true side. The problem, however, was less disturbing to him than it might have proved even two months earlier in his career.

Storrow made his way back to the punch-bowl, more disturbed by that malodorous small incident than he cared to admit even to himself. It seemed to throw him out of key with his surroundings and he felt the need of the warming fluid in the huge cut-glass bowl to wash the chill of the thing out of his body. He found himself possessed of a vague disquiet and an equally vague distrust of the influences which the city had brought to bear upon him. Nor was this diminished by the memory of what Pannie Atwill had been saying to him. Yet when he thought of Torrie Throssel he thought of her as he had last seen her through the open door of her studio, protesting that she would have to stay at home to study

her part and finish up her sewing. The thought of her bent over that sewing, needle in hand, seemed as incongruous as it was appealing. It was a new phase of her character to which he had given little thought. Yet it was something on which he found it not unpleasant to dwell, until, by way of contrast, he stared about at the company of which he found himself a member. He became conscious of the parade of flesh in half-costumed models and bobbed-hair girl-artists with insurrectory eyes and voices made loud by wine. The earlier freedom of intercourse which had seemed so like sexlessness to him was now not quite so innocent of aspect. There was more abandon in the dancing, a frank and somewhat dishevelled surrender to voluptuousness that was even more marked in the tired and sprawling groups in the half-lighted alcoves. The women who had appeared so rose-like in their loveliness, earlier in the evening, now seemed to carry a taint of lewdness. Their hair was untidy and their costumes stained. Undeniably, too, they smelt of perspiration which the musky aroma of their deodorants failed to dissemble. And even the most girlish of the women began to look old, drained of their vital young forces by those Bacchanalian hours where the spirit of Carnival finally balanced her ledger, exacting hostess that she is, and demanded final payment for excess. Loosening and levitating as that atmosphere was, with its negroid music and its noisy camaraderie, Storrow was still insufficiently touched by its spirit to overlook its laboured and strident lightheartedness. It had the trick, when the music stopped, of flattening out into over-coloured uglinesses. The joy that it harboured had to be kept spinning, as a top is kept spinning, or it tumbled heavily and lay inert along its dusty floors. Storrow found himself asking if this was the New York he had come in quest of, and if these were the illustrious from whose lips he had once hoped to drink wisdom.

Almost as if in answer to that question he found him-

self confronted by Chester Hardy with a regal-looking woman on his arm.

"Storrow, will you guard Miss Klennert from this army of outlaws until I find her *chauffeur* for her?"

Storrow recognized the Broadway star, as she held out her hand to him, from the familiar enough pictures in the magazines. She complained, in a surprisingly full and throaty voice, of being a little tired of the crowd and noise.

"The Anglo-Saxon can't quite get away with it, can he?" remarked Hardy, lingering for a moment to view the multi-coloured mass of merrymakers about them.

"It seems to need a touch of the Latin," assented Miss Klennert.

"I was wondering," observed Storrow, "if it wasn't because they worked so hard that they found it necessary to play so hard."

"Wait until the side-show starts," called back the departing Hardy.

"You're right in a way," said the Broadway star, turning to Storrow. "But I'm afraid they're not all workers. Donnie Eastman, I'm sure, never worked at anything but enjoying life — though that, I suppose, soon becomes as onerous an undertaking as any man can face. And these girls, for instance, seem to be the Greenwich Village product, who try to give you Murger and Montmartre with American trimmings. But to me it's always terribly like the *Cammerbert* that comes from the Connecticut creameries. The note seems forced. They make ready for it too deliberately and work over it too hard. It isn't a romp, you'll notice, a romp which young people have suddenly decided upon. It's something as carefully planned and staged as a theatrical production. And there are too many oldish men about to let it keep its air of innocence, even if it began with one. I could even stand Brownie's Sodom-and-Gomorrah atmosphere, for that merely affects one's morals, but I can't stand

air like this, for smoke affects my throat, and that's what I have to make my living with."

"It's new to me, of course," admitted Storrow, "but I can't help comparing it with the Tea Dance and the Sun Dance of the Indians I've been living with up in my own country. There's more dignity in the Indian affair, I think, and also more ecstasy. And with the Indian it isn't an end in itself. It's ceremonial; it stands for something. On the whole, I'd say this was the more barbaric of the two."

He found himself being inspected by a pair of shrewd eyes absinthe-green in colour.

"Of course it's barbaric," acknowledged the woman at his side. "That's why it has swept this city off its feet. It's tarantism, and tarantism spreads like any other epidemic. But it's not worth worrying over too much, I suppose, for the thing will work its own cure. It *has* to, or where will we all end up?"

"It has the trick of getting into your blood, all right," protested Storrow, edging away from what seemed like useless philosophying.

"What has?" He could feel the disdainful absinthe-green eyes once more judicially inspecting his person.

"The being keyed up to carnival pitch, even if it is helped along by the punch-bowl."

"Since you have mentioned the punch-bowl," announced the cool-eyed woman beside Storrow, "look at the girl opposite us here, trying to dance with that man with the leopard-skin over his shoulder. I don't like women when they're drunk. I don't even like to see them. It still gives me a shock, the same as — as that doddering old skeleton in the Beau Brummel get-up."

Storrow followed the line of her vision and stared at the arresting enough figure which had just entered the room.

"That's Modrynski," he said, with a vague sense of chilliness in his bones.

"I know it," admitted the wistful-eyed woman, "and I imagine there's a moral in him if you cared to find it."

More eyes than Storrow's stared at Modrynski as he made his entrance into the room. He carried a shepherd's crook tied with dangling white ribbon, and was dressed in cream-coloured knee-breeches, a satin tunic with lace at the cuffs and neck, a brocaded waistcoat, silk stockings, and very pointed pumps with silver buckles. A heavily powdered periwig ornamented his bald head and on one flaccid cheek a beauty-patch had been pasted. He seemed to realize that he was the momentary target of that company's attention, for he made an effort to enter the room jauntily, with his head high and his thumb and forefinger daintily touching, as though in the act of dispensing a pinch of snuff. But a slight palsy shook the fastidiously poised hand. The decrepid legs in the shimmering silk stockings were without spring.

The woman beside Storrow stirred uneasily.

"He makes me think of a Watteau fan that's been used as a fly-swatter," she meditatively observed. Then she added, almost with a shudder, "And there are the flies, still clustering about him!"

To the equally meditative Storrow he seemed like a figure of Father Time, with a *Follies-Bergere* crook instead of the scythe of the Reaper. But he seemed well enough known to the rest of the room, especially the younger girls in the more audacious costumes, for they were clustering about the senile old figure, chippering like sparrows, demanding him as a partner. He picked out a plump young brunette and danced with her. But the too rapid movements of those too modern dances were over-much for him. He had to come to a stop, breathing wheezily through his blue-nostrilled nose, leaning a little on his uproariously laughing partner, who kept possession of him against all rivals and finally piloted him in the direction of the punch-bowl. There Storrow stood watching the withered figure in lace and ruffles,

with a circle of petticoated youth crowding about his palsied uplifted fingers as he drank.

"I wonder if you get what I mean?" asked the woman at Storrow's side, out of the silence which had fallen over the two as they watched.

"I think I see the point," acknowledged Storrow, catching sight of Hardy as he elbowed his way towards them. The newcomer seemed to realize the object of their attention. He too wheeled about and took a turn, before carrying off the level-browed actress with the cool green eyes, in inspecting Modrynski and the circle about Modrynski.

"And think of the knowledge that was once packed away in that poor old skull!" commented Hardy, as much to himself as to the others.

"It makes you wonder if it's all worth while," observed the no longer youthful Miss Klennert as she gathered up her skirts. The movement was unconscious, born of a life-long contention against dusty stage-wings.

"That *Helen* of his in the Louvre and those two bronzes up in the Metropolitan ought to be answer enough for that," was Hardy's reply.

"If that's what you judge him by!"

"That's the way we prefer to judge Poe and Villon and Heine and half a hundred others."

"Yes," agreed the departing actress as she smiled farewell to Storrow, "it's the sick oyster that seems to make the perfect pearl, isn't it?" She turned again, to give emphasis to her line, as though it were an exit-speech on the stage.

Storrow was still standing there when Hardy returned from the street-door. The latter, for a silent minute or two, contemplated the busy scene before him.

"How does it impress you?" he finally asked of his companion.

The younger man hesitated. "I'd rather know what *you* think about it," he parried, none too keen to be turned

about like a test-tube for the contemplation of purely personal reactions.

"I don't think about it," retorted Hardy with a laugh. "I prefer to jump into it and enjoy it."

"Then you *do* enjoy it?"

"Don't you?"

"Candidly, it strikes me as being a trifle unclean."

"A welter of sex?" prompted Hardy, with his mild and impersonal eye on the younger man's face.

"If you care to put it that way," acknowledged Storrow.

"Well, that's what life is, really, when you look at it with the lid off. And the lid seems to be off here!"

They were jostled by a bevy of screaming girls pursued by a *Mephistopheles* in a red cloak much stained with punch.

"Then I prefer life with the lid on!" Storrow announced.

Hardy smiled.

"But isn't this a case of the artist hungering to get earth under his feet, after a heap of soaring? Most of those men are workers. They demand the right to relax, to play, to re-animalize themselves. And that strikes me as a great deal for men to accomplish. Then there's another point you run the danger of overlooking. If you're nursing the artist's hunger for a genuine understanding of the human soul, you can't afford to inspect it only in its edifying aspects, when it has its company manners on. If truth is what you're after, you've got to see it all, good and bad, and at the same time keep your balance. Our disapproval has nothing to do with the thing as a spectacle. This is society in the undress, the Freudian wish with its mask off, the *libido* which even you sculptors and painters have been compelled to recognize. If you want to understand the human figure, you have to study it in the nude. In the same way, if you want to understand the human soul, you've got to

study it in the undress. The only point that's important is not to lose your viewpoint as — well, I might almost say, as a scholar and a gentleman. That allows you to organize what you observe, and also what you experience."

Storrow, turning those words over in his own mind, felt their wisdom. Yet it was a wisdom with a sting in it. Hardy was preaching at him.

"And there's one other thing I want to mention, while we're still so tangled up with the orders of the day," the older man went on. "Whatever does happen, don't let it interfere with your work. Put your work first, and keep it first. For the bigger the artist, you'll find, the more he'll insist on — I was going to say, on that selfishness, but it would be better to say, on that scheme of self-preservation."

Pannie Atwill, passing at that moment, lightheartedly threw a kiss from her clustered finger-tips to the thoughtful-eyed Captain Kidd. But that scourge of the high seas did not seem to see the movement.

## CHAPTER TEN

STORROW went home, but not to sleep. As he mounted the gloomy stairways that led to his studio he stopped suddenly, sniffing in the darkness. There was an unmistakable smell of gas about the building. That was one of the drawbacks, he mentally remarked, in living in those ramshackle old ruins. There was always the promise of defective plumbing, the evidence of repairs deferred. And somewhere, without a doubt, a pipe-joint had sprung a leak.

Once inside his studio, he crossed to the corner of the room where a panelled clothes-horse, covered with painted burlap, shut off from general view the kitchenette which held his small gas-stove. He switched on the light and examined this stove carefully, to make sure the leak was not within his own territory. There, however, he found nothing wrong. The air within the studio, in fact, was quite untainted.

Frowning, he advanced towards the oblong of tapestry on his wall. He threw back the imitation Gobelin and sniffed along the doorcracks. This, however, did not satisfy him. Without giving actual thought to the movement he slipped back the metal bolt and tried the door.

His first surprise came with the fact that it opened. His second surprise lay in the discovery that the lights were on in Torrie Throssel's studio. And his third surprise took the form of Torrie Throssel herself, standing within three feet of him. She was wearing a man's bath-robe, which was much too big for her, doubled about her waist and held in by a girdle of plaited silk. Her preoccupied face, he noticed, was almost colourless. The

studio behind her, he also noticed, impressed him as being over-lavish in its decorations, almost theatrical in its studiously achieved Orientalism.

"I've been waiting for you," she said, very quietly, and with a smile of slow constraint that was new to her.

More than ever before, as he stood staring at her, he was conscious of her appeal. But the preoccupation on her face disturbed him.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked, slowly moving through the open door. If that portal had once taken on to him the significance of a Rubicon, he seemed to have forgotten the fact.

"I'm worried," the girl told him. She lifted one shoulder, deprecatingly. "It may be foolish, but I can't get the thing out of my head."

"What thing?" asked Storrow. She lifted a hand as though to touch his arm, or to grope to him, if not for support at least for personal contact. But to his disappointment she changed her mind and drew the hand away again.

"There's been a smell of gas coming from young Muselli's studio," he heard her saying. A selfish wave of relief flowed through him as he listened. "And I'm — I'm afraid something may have happened."

"What *could* happen?" demanded Storrow.

"That's what we ought to find out," she replied.

"Then you know him?" Storrow asked, the prey of a quick and incongruous pang of jealousy, vaguely unhappy at the recurring thought of how wide was the undefined circle of her acquaintances.

"No," she explained. "But I've noticed him at different times. He looked worried and struck me as being — as being in trouble in some way. And I know that he was fond of those two canaries of his. That's the one thing that made me wait up for you."

"Canaries?" echoed Storrow.

"Some time tonight he put his canary-cage outside his door, before locking it."

It still struck Storrow as being slightly ridiculous. And he was thinking more of the misty violet eyes in the side-light and the misty rose of the grave lips than he was of Muselli and his canary-cage.

"So that's the reason you waited up for me!" he said, slowly propelled towards her by a power which seemed to lie beyond the realm of his own will. He could wonder at that power, even as it gripped him, making him feel that this body of his was still an embryo in reason but centuries old in emotion, little more than a passive river-bed through which coursed the currents of undecipherable ancestral tendencies.

She must have read his intention on his face, for she lifted her two hands and held them against his shoulders, as though to arrest his advance.

"Not now," she said in a whisper that had a quaver of emotion in it.

"But I've been thinking of you — all night," he whispered back.

She took a deep breath.

"And I have been thinking of you," she admitted, almost unhappily. "I'm always thinking of you. I can't help it."

He stood staring at her, with a rush of all the blood in his body to his heart. He wondered why, at a moment so inapposite, her loveliness should beleaguer him, why she should seem so essentially Woman, in the voluminous rough garment that left her so doe-soft in its loose and rugged folds. And the tinder of his longing had already caught fire from the small torch of her confession.

"We're both fighting against something that's too strong for us," he protested, almost unconscious of what he was saying.

"I know it," murmured the woman in the bath-robe

as rough-textured as a fellah's garment. Her head bowed, not in shame, but more in submission to the inevitable. She seemed anxious to avoid his eyes. But the man beside her slowly lifted her face. Then with a movement that seemed equally deliberate he drew her towards him. Her breath caught, sharply, as he stooped and kissed her in the warm hollow of the milk-white throat. Then his arms closed about the muffled body and on her upturned lips his own lips closed. He remembered Modrynski. He remembered Vibbard. He thought of Chester Hardy, and he had not altogether forgotten Pannie Atwill. But they seemed figures infinitely remote, crying in thin and faraway voices that meant nothing to him.

"Beloved!" murmured the warmer voice against his face. She spoke drowsily, out of a contentment so complete it seemed wordless. And there was aggression, he noticed, in her sudden passiveness itself. It seemed to demand mastery and subjugation. It evoked ancestral savageries from straining arms that seemed already cruel in their unconsidering strength.

"Beloved," he repeated, bending back her body in that sudden impulse of appropriation until she was compelled to cling to him to keep from falling.

He stared at her, like a sleeper awakening, when she suddenly stiffened in his arms. She was trying to twist away from him, white and wide-eyed.

"What is it?" he asked.

"That man," she gasped. "We've forgotten him! We don't know what might have happened!"

He reached for a chair-back, to steady himself. It took time to throw a bridge of thought across a gulf so wide.

"What could happen?" he asked. Yet each of them knew, as their eyes met, what the other was thinking.

"I couldn't get any answer when I knocked," she explained, following him as he started towards the door.

He stopped only for a moment, to pull off what remained of his ridiculous costume. Then he went out to the hall.

He found the smell of gas very strong there. He was suddenly impressed by the tomb-like quietness of the building. Torrie kept one hand on his arm as he made his way towards Muselli's door. Beside this door he saw a bird-cage. One of the canaries twittered sleepily, disturbed, apparently, by movement so close to it.

Storrow lifted the cage away and dropped to his hands and knees. Then he sniffed along the bottom of the door. The smell of gas was stronger than ever there. His face was grave as he looked up at the girl in the bath-robe. Mechanically he tried the door and found it locked. Then he backed slowly away, facing it.

"What are you going to do?" asked Torrie in a whisper. The quietness of the empty halls seemed more oppressive than ever.

"I'm going to break in that door," he told her. "You mustn't come in, remember."

Before she could reply to that question he flung himself full force against the locked door. The impact of his bony shoulder against the antique panelling sent it in with a crash, splintering the lock away from the woodwork. Storrow peered in through the darkness, but could make nothing out.

"Do you want matches?" whispered Torrie behind him. He turned on her sharply.

"Matches? And blow the house up?" he demanded.

"Well, what shall I do?" she whisperingly inquired.

"Go back to your room and wait for me. Go back, or you may be sorry."

Holding his breath against the poisoned air, he groped his way in through the door and across the room to a window, which he found closed and locked. It took him some time to get it open. When he did so he was glad to lean out over the sill, for a minute or two, and fill his

lungs with fresh air. Then, feeling the night-breeze bellow cleansingly into the room, he crossed to the doorway and padded along the wall, groping for the light-switch which should be there. He found it at last and pressed his finger against the smooth-faced button.

He stood there, still half-turned towards the wall, staring over his shoulder. On the floor, between him and a couch-bed against the farther wall, he saw the figure of a young man lying on its face. On the disordered bed he saw a woman, partly dressed. She, too, was young. Her mouth was open and her eyes were staring, staring in such a manner that for a moment Storrow thought she was still alive.

Storrow felt the need of fresh air again, and he stood at the open window for several seconds before turning off a gas-jet connected with a hot-plate rubber-tube from which poison was still hissing. Then he crossed to the figure on the floor and quietly turned it over. The body was quite cold. Storrow knew, even before he put his hand over the heart, that any movement there would be out of the question. He had heard somewhere that a dead body should never be touched, should never be moved, until a coroner or a police officer had been called in to inspect it. That struck Storrow as a very absurd proceeding. The position of the man, prone there on the unclean floor, also struck him as unnecessarily humiliating. So he lifted the inert body, startlingly light to carry, and placed it decently on the bed, covering it with the sheet. He noticed, as he proceeded to do the same with the woman, that the skin of her bare shoulder was marble-cold to the touch. He noticed, too, that her face was much more tranquil than the man's. And they both struck him as being young, absurdly young, for any such end. And it was the end. Everything had come to a stop in those two passive and unprotesting frames. The light had gone out in the skulls behind the white masks.

He turned away and looked more methodically about

the room. On the table he found two letters, sealed. He saw where newspapers had been wedged in the door-cracks, even the key-holes stuffed. The entire thing, of course, had been planned, had been deliberately carried through. But the man, Storrow concluded, must at some time have repented of his bargain, must have weakened and made an effort to reach a window. Storrow, with a leaden weight in the pit of his stomach, was able to dramatize those last struggles. He even tried to imagine that final conference together, pondering over the problem of whether it was placid or frantic, cowardly or courageous. It struck him as strange that under the same roof where he lived, where he harboured his own small hopes and fears and aims, this other man on the bed had been just as intensely involved in the machinery of life, had just as ardently asked for happiness. And he, Owen Storrow, within a biscuit's toss of it all, had known nothing about it.

He was backing slowly away from the bed when he felt a hand on his arm. He found Torrie beside him, her lips parted, her eyes narrowed with a curiosity which she could not control. She seemed quite collected to him, unnaturally collected, until he noticed the hand holding the folds of the loose bath-robe over her bosom. The fingers of that hand, he could see, were shaking.

"You mustn't come in here," he commanded. But she disregarded that command.

"There are two of them," she whispered slowly, a troubled wonder wrinkling her white brow. Step by step she advanced towards the bed, as though impelled by a force which she could not overmaster. There was something so suggestive of somnambulism, of intense preoccupation, in her movements that Storrow wondered if this could be the first time she had stood face to face with Death. Torrie was stooping, with her chin forward, as though peering through mist. Then she stood up straight, still frowning.

"That's Nona Maynelle," she whisperingly intoned, drawing closer to Storrow with a movement that was both wistful and unwilled, stricken with the sudden need of companionship. But all the time her eyes were on the bed.

"Did you know her?" asked Storrow.

"She was a model," was the abstracted reply, "but all last season she was at the Winter Garden!"

Storrow made no response to this. He had awakened to the fact that they were wasting time over incidentals, that something must be done, and done at once. He became almost impatient at the sustained impersonal curiosity of the peering-eyed girl beside him.

"But are they dead?" she whispered with a small wringing motion of the hands as imploratory as a prayer. "*Can* they be?"

"Hours ago," said Storrow with forced curtness of tone. He noticed, in the ash-tray on the table where the two letters lay, eight cigarette-stubs side by side. Storrow counted them. They must, he concluded, have been very deliberate about it all. His curt retort to Torrie, he next noticed, had stung her into an unlooked for and sudden activity. She wrapped the loose robe closer about her waist, retied the girdle, and crossed to the table. There she took up the two letters, seemed to understand at a glance what they were, and promptly thrust them down into the huge pocket of her garment.

"We must telephone for the police," Storrow was repeating as he watched her go to the hot-plate, bend over it, and then carefully close the stop-cock at the lower end of the rubber tube. Then she deliberately pulled the upper end of the tubing from the gas-pipe where Storrow had already shut off the flow.

"What are you doing?" he demanded. She was staring, white-faced and thoughtful, about the disordered room. He repeated the question before she seemed to hear him.

"That makes it an accident," she said pointing towards the dangling hot-plate tubing.

"An accident?" he repeated, not understanding her intentions.

"I'm not going to have this whole city pawing over those poor kids," she tremulously but determinedly announced. "They've paid enough without going to a Potter's Field. And they've got families, somewhere; they must have. It'll hurt enough to know they're dead, without having people say they've killed themselves."

Storrow, staring at her, found strength in that face in which he had once seen only beauty.

"But that isn't for us to decide," he argued, recalling vague impressions as to the law that obtained in such circumstances.

"We *have* decided," she protested, almost sharply.

"But we haven't the right," he still continued.

"Then we'll take it," was her retort. She stood silent a moment, after another quick survey of the room. "If *you* were like that, wouldn't it seem the decent thing to do? Wouldn't you be glad to know that somebody was doing what they could to keep your name clean?"

A vague and chilling sense of discomfort flowed through Storrow's body as she put that challenge to him. He failed to see that it would make any difference. And he had no intention of ever being like that. But he knew it was useless to argue with her.

"You can telephone from my room," she was saying to him. "I'll put out the light and fix the door so it will stay shut. And neither of us must forget that it was an accident, remember, an accident!"

He did as she asked. It flashed through him, as he sat waiting for his connection after calling up Police Headquarters, that life was crowding closer about him than he had anticipated. It was crowding about him raw and undraped, with its beauty and ugliness tragically

tangled together. Already that night somebody had sought to inform him that he was inspecting life with the lid off. That had been in reference to the foolish and fantastic spectacle of a fancy-dress ball, the occasion of a band of mummers drinking and gyrating to jazz-band music. But here, almost at his own door, was a very different kind of life with the lid off, a life that chilled the marrow and benumbed the mind instead of loosening the tongue and tickling the toes with the tinklings of ragtime.

He strode through the door that still stood open between the two studios. He pulled off the heavy-topped boots, contemptuously, and reached for his slippers and dressing-gown, glad of the warmth of that heavier garment about him. It seemed a long time, he remembered, since he had left that studio and gone lightheartedly down to join Hardy in his waiting taxi-cab. It impressed him as odd that utter strangers should have the power thus to disturb him, even in their death. The city, he saw, brought one's fellow-beings a little closer about one. There was no escape from its tangled interplay of influences. It was a tribal convention between eternal rivalries. It was a melting-pot in which personal independence merged and flowed into a drab communal compound. He was one of a colony, and nothing more. He was, in a way, at the mercy of his neighbours. They were always to be reckoned with, for they had the power, obviously, both of raising him up and casting him down. And behind it all, apparently, was the demand to unify and fulfil life, to clarify some far-off dream.

Storrow, as he thought this over, sat staring vacantly at the wall before him. It was Torrie's voice that roused him.

"Here's your policeman," she announced, almost reprovingly, from the doorway.

Storrow met the officer at the head of the stairs. It was much simpler, after all, than he had expected. He

explained how he had come in late, had smelled gas, had traced it to this man Muselli's door, and had felt that something might be wrong. He had thought it best, when they couldn't get any answer to their knocks, to break in the door.

"And this is what we found," explained Storrow as he pushed back the broken panels, reached in, and switched on the electric-light. The heavy blue-clad figure crossed to the couch-bed. Storrow, who noticed for the first time that Torrie stood close behind him, did not follow. He stood there waiting until the officer came outside again.

"They're dead, all right," he heavily and impersonally remarked as he reached into his hip-pocket for a small note-book. "Who are they?" he just as impersonally demanded.

"I never knew them," Storrow told him. "I've only been in this building a few weeks."

"What's your name?"

Storrow gave it.

"What d' you do when you forced that door?" was the next question. Storrow could feel the hand of the girl at his side reaching for his arm.

"I opened the window and then turned off the jet where the gas was escaping."

"What next?"

It was Torrie who answered.

"We realized there'd been an accident and called up police headquarters," she explained in tones so cool that Storrow stood abashed in his own awkwardness. The officer looked up from his note-book, with a quick inspection of the robe-clad figure clinging to Storrow's arm.

"It was an accident then?" he asked.

"Doesn't it look like one to you?" questioned the girl.

"Sure," he assented as his big fingers once more fell

to penciling on the little page. "We'll report it that, anyway."

The rest of the explaining was done by Torrie. Storrow awakened to the fact that the big-shouldered officer was not unconscious of her beauty. He stood more ponderously attentive when she spoke. He waited with taurine patience until she had explained what was already obvious to him. He even showed his teeth in a grin of sympathy when he said he supposed she'd rather be in bed at an hour like this. Then he turned to Storrow and announced that the latter would be wanted at the precinct station sometime during the next day. It was, he explained as he tucked away his note-book, merely a matter of form. He stopped, arrested by the gleam of a white ankle as the girl beside Storrow drew the over-voluminous folds of her bath-robe together.

"This woman your wife?" he casually inquired.

Storrow for a moment seemed not to have heard the question. Then he just as casually retorted, "Yes."

It was not until they were alone in the studio, with the door closed behind them, that Storrow noticed the contemplative and almost perplexed look on Torrie's face.

"Why did you say that?" she asked him.

"What?"

"That I was your wife?"

"I wanted to protect you," he explained.

"From what?"

He found the question not an easy one to answer. He floundered through a phrase or two about "intimacy of attire" and "unusual hour for being together." But speech trailed away from him before the brooding coldness of her glance.

"Isn't it rather late for that sort of thing?" she asked him. As no answer came to that question she sat down, huddled and small, with a short shiver of weariness running through her body. Storrow noticed the heavy shadows under her eyes.

"Are you tired?" he asked, so gently that for a moment she glanced up at him.

"It's not being tired," she said with a look over her shoulder towards the door. "It's that awful room — and what's in it. I can't get the thought of it out of my head."

"I know," he told her, comprehendingly.

"We'd both be better with some of this," she said as she opened a black-wooded cabinet, and filled two glasses with brandy and seltzer. Storrow stood staring at it. He had no stomach for more drink that night.

"Are you sure that door is locked?" asked the girl, out of the silence. She watched him from under lowered brows as he slowly crossed the room and reassured her that the lock was on. They were trying to bar out, he remembered, something which no wood and no metal could keep away from them. He stared at the other door, the communicating door between the two studios that stood side by side. He saw that it was open. There too, he felt, they had tried to bar out something which was equally impervious to obstruction. The house was very silent. They seemed suddenly as alone in the world as though a hemlocked wilderness lay about them. They seemed alone, yet all the while they kept thinking of that ghostly company which the same roof covered and the same walls harboured.

Storrow sat down in a high-backed wing-chair, with that sobering thought of death heavy on his mind. Torrie, without moving, watched him for a moment or two. Then she slipped out of her chair and crossed listlessly to where he sat. There she dropped to the rug at his feet, with her arms falling over his knees. She twisted her body, in a series of birdlike and nestling movements, until she was comfortably placed. He rested a hand on the dark mass of her hair, looking down at her bowed head. Slowly she looked up at him as he fell to stroking the heavy plaits.

"I can't stay alone tonight," she said whisperingly as her arms tightened about his knees.

He stared down at the shadowy face, questioningly.

"I *can't,*" she repeated, with vehemence. "I can't — with *those* in there, so close to me!"

He nodded his comprehension.

"It must be almost morning," he said in a voice heavy with fatigue. "Shouldn't you go to bed?"

Her hands relaxed and she rose slowly to her feet. "I suppose so," she said with a sigh. Languidly she reached over and switched out the lights, leaving only one small bulb half-hidden under the Ruskin-green arm of a Hebe in bronze on the console table beside her. Storrow in the half-light could see her untying the knotted girdle about her waist. He heard the soft fall of the bath-robe as she flung it across a chair-seat, the faint whine of covered metal springs as she sank on the low Russian bed of carved teak-wood.

He rose slowly as she called to him, raising on one arm in the blue-green light so rich with shadows.

"By the way, there's a letter or something on the table there for you. I almost forgot."

Storrow groped his way towards the table.

"How did it get here?" he asked.

"Somebody's chauffeur or coachman or thing-um-abob brought it about an hour after you'd left for Brownie Tell's," was the casual-noted reply from the Russian bed. "I heard them at your door and said I'd deliver it when you got back."

Storrow found the sealed envelope, partly covered by an ash-tray, and opened it. He had to hold the tinted page close to the small light under the Hebe's arm before he could make it out. Then he saw that it was from Charlotte Kirkner.

"Mother is not at all well," ran the note, "and is anxious to see you. We've had to give up all thought of going South. Would it be too much to ask you to run

out tonight with Munsell? It may be important."

Storrow put the note back in its envelope and crossed to the window. He stared out over the serrated skyline of housetops where a faint grey in the sky showed the earliest light of morning. The night was already over. Storrow pushed the note down in his dressing-gown pocket.

"You're not going to leave me?" asked a drowsily-cadenced voice out of the heavier darkness of the room behind him.

Slowly Storrow turned and crossed to the Russian bed. He reached for the wing-chair and sank down in it. As he did so a hand was thrust into his, a warm hand, softly cushioned about the thumb-joint, passive only in its motionlessness. He held it, silent and thoughtful, as he sat there waiting for the daylight.

. . . . . .

It was the following afternoon that Storrow, in answer to Charlotte's message, made his way over to Brooklyn. He waited ill at ease in the huge library of the Kirkner home. It was Medberry, as immobile as ever, who brought a somewhat tardy message down to him. Mrs. Kirkner had taken a turn for the better. But the doctor had given orders that she was not to be disturbed.

Storrow, weighed down by a sense of estrangement, asked if he could possibly see Charlotte. Miss Kirkner, he was told, was not at home. But Medberry would see to it that any message which might be left would reach her on her return.

Storrow, beyond an expression of conventional regrets, knew of no message, and with no ponderable lessening of restraint took his departure. Two days later he received a short note from Charlotte explaining that her mother had so greatly improved that she would be taken South as soon as she could be safely moved. She hoped

Owen would have a happy and successful winter. It struck Storrow as odd that the expression of a hope so benignant should carry with it so keen a barb of discomfiture to its recipient.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE sound of gasps and wails, of pleadings and imprecations, echoed through the gloomy old building off Madison Square.

"Awful!" shouted a man's voice when the agony had come to an end. "Simply awful!"

"Then why can't you let me do it my own way?" demanded the tearful voice of a woman.

"That's just what's the matter. You haven't got any way. If you'd pull a few feathers from the wings of your imagination and stick them in the tail of your judgment, you might get somewhere."

"Then stop ridiculing me!"

"I'll ridicule you as long as you don't do things right. I'm the big ki-ky of this kennel, and you're going to do what I say."

"If you're claiming to be a dog, I agree with you," was the impassioned retort.

"Then we'll let it go at that and get back to our work. And just save a little of that pep, please, for professional purposes!"

It was the labour-pains of Art, and the olive-skinned Hebrew known as Herman Krassler come to coach Torrie Throssel in her new part. He had worked with her an hour, at first quietly and patiently, then excitedly and explosively, before Storrow in the next room fully understood what was taking place. He realized, during what became an incredibly noisy scene, that the fiery-hearted little man of the stage was putting forth every effort to impart fire to the protesting and somewhat bewildered girl confronting him. It was an emotional "bit," ap-

parently, and the novice was neither sure of her way nor fully conscious of what was expected of her.

"Now, try that again, and for the love of God get a little life into it!" Storrow could hear her all but exasperated coach demand.

"I tell you, Hermie, I can't! I can't do it!" was the almost sullen protest of the girl, in a voice already heavy with fatigue.

"You've *got* to," commanded the other. And he proceeded to goad and taunt her into renewed activity, jockeying her into position again and again as a rider urges a spirited hunter up to an exceptionally hazardous jump.

Storrow resented that arbitrary assumption of control over the mind and body of the girl. He began to comprehend what was taking place on the other side of the wall. He realized the domination, for the moment at least, of that quicker will over the less adroit will of his pupil. Krassler was trying to empty a human body of its own personality and thrust an altogether different one, a make-believe one, into its place. He was taking possession of her, manipulating her, reassembling her to suit his own ends.

"No! No! No! Don't *whine* that! That's your big line and you've got to get some heart-break into it. Don't sing it like a sick parrot. *Feel* it, woman, feel it!"

"I can't feel it. It's a fool of a line, and you know it!"

"It's certainly a fool of a line when you read it that way," was the other's impassioned retort. "Any line would be. But the line's there, and you've got to squeeze the last drop of life out of it. That's what God gave you a brain for. So go back and try it again. And don't swallow your voice as though you had a hot potato against your tonsils. Throw it out — straight out in front of you. Throw it out so it'll hit eight hundred people flat in the face."

It was tried again, and Krassler groaned aloud. Then

still again came explanation, expostulation, the lash of mockery, the high-pitched curt commands. And again a voice which did not seem Torrie's voice pleaded and shook with its factitious emotion, rose and fell with its waves of purely imaginary woe, choked in a frantically achieved imitation of a sob.

"You're getting it, girl, you're getting it," cried the excited voice of Krassler. "Now keep on and go through the whole scene. . . . Drop your voice on that, and don't move until you come to the words 'I never knew — I never knew'. . . . Keep your spine stiff. . . . No, no, you can't beat your chest-bone like a baboon. You can't do that on Broadway — they canned that twenty years ago. . . . Look, like this. . . . And freeze on that word 'Forever'— don't move a muscle until *Randolph* flings the letters in your face!"

Storrow overheard it all with a vague disquiet in his soul. He more and more resented this seeming appropriation of Torrie's personality, even in the name of Art. He resented the thought of her being exploited and swayed and harassed by this professional exploiter of emotion. It seemed to involve the submergence of her own individuality. It tended to translate her into something new, something chillingly remote. And the thought of any such estrangement was already painful to him.

He paced his room, trying to think the thing out, trying to persuade himself that it was something more than sheer physical jealousy. His heart was still a parliament of these silent debating voices when he heard Krassler saying good-night to Torrie. It was not Krassler the impresario but Krassler the man who spoke now, cordially and a little wearily, as he laughingly complained that even on Broadway you have to break your eggs before you can make your omelette. At almost the same moment, in the contentious forum of his own soul, Storrow suddenly perceived that there was only one way out for him.

Torrie would have to marry him.

Up to that time, indeed, he had given scant thought to marriage, as marriage. He had been played on but lightly by the social forces about him, and the established covenant of mating seemed to him as essentially a social ceremony. Yet in his case, he felt, it was something distinctly more than a movement to legalize the illicit. He nursed a natural enough desire to be honest and aboveboard in his human relationships. But there was a more personal aspect of the situation. He was already in a position from which he could not extricate himself, a position in which he found no wish to extricate himself. Retreat, under the circumstances, was impossible. And since he could not go back, since what had been done had been done, he must now push through to the end of the tunnel. What he had taken must be made entirely and unquestioningly his own. It would surely be a clarifying of the situation, he felt, that establishment of proprietorship. It would bring things down to earth. It would materialize what otherwise might stand over-romantic and over-exacting. It would do away with those too disturbing accidental meetings which were remembered now as storms and tempests are apt to be remembered. Meetings such as those, he felt, would in some way lead to tragedy.

They would have to marry, if only to save themselves. The wild bird would become a tame one, but the music of life would be forever at his elbow, would be tied to him, would become a part of him. He felt the need of superseding all other claimants to Torrie's time and attention. She had spelled, and still spelled, wonder and rapture to him. And he was still youthful enough to demand that this same wonder and rapture of the passing moment should be made absolute as well as permanent. It was a strange situation, he acknowledged. It loomed before him as something almost too disturbingly new to be intimately inspected. Yet it was merely the ancient

miracle of life repeating itself. A man had fallen in love with a woman, and wanted that woman as his own.

He crossed to the communicating door and seized the knob. Then, after a moment of hesitation, he inquiringly tapped on the panel.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Of course," answered Torrie's voice, unnaturally quiet through the muffling panel of wood.

Storrow opened the door and stepped into her studio. She was partly undressed, but this did not deter him.

"What is it, Honey?" she asked, arrested by the look of solemnity on his face, staring at him over her bare shoulder.

He stood with his back to the wall, with a dueller's space between them.

"I want you to marry me," he said, more abruptly than he had intended to say it.

She stopped in the act of unhooking her corsets, her torso indrawn with that characteristic visceral writhe and contraction which always impressed him as reptilious. She looked up at him, wide-eyed with wonder. Then, still without speaking, she slowly continued to release the steel-banded cuirass of brocaded silk from her body, standing deep in thought as she dropped it on the chair beside her.

"What good would that do?" she finally asked.

"Every good in the world," he contended.

She reached, still thoughtful-eyed, for the tissue of silk and lace that lay within reach of her hand. He turned and walked to the end of the room, as though some new relationship had given rise to some new abashment in him. There he stood with his back to her as she abstractedly proceeded with her disrobing.

He resented, without quite deciphering the reason for doing so, that offhanded intimacy of action. Yet it was both too unconscious and too characteristic to be set

down as audacity. It was innocent, he reminded himself, because it was unstudied. But he remained resolutely turned away from the soft confusion of sounds behind him.

"Will you marry me?" he repeated.

His ear caught the sigh that escaped her: it was almost one of forbearance.

"Wait until I crawl into my downy, Honey. I'm so dog-tired!"

He waited. He waited until he heard her fatigued little *coo* of subsidence, listening to the complaint of the burdened coil-springs with a sense of history repeating itself.

"Owen," she called out to him.

He swung about, nettled by a feeling of frustration. But he made no movement towards her. She lay with her hand supporting her head, studying him out of veiled eyes.

"Come here," she said in a strangely altered voice.

Slowly he crossed to her side, puzzling as to what unknown hand could be wringing the glory out of a situation from which he had once anticipated both rapture and triumph. She too seemed to feel that something was lacking from that encounter, something rare and indefinable, something already vanished and evaporated. She dropped back on her pillow, almost listlessly, and lay there for a moment or two without speaking.

"Do you love me?" she finally demanded.

"You know I do," was Storrow's retort.

"But are you sure?"

"I'm trying to prove it."

"How?"

"By asking you to marry me," he contended, wondering at the combative note which he could not keep from his voice.

"What difference can that make?" she demanded.

"Having some old man mumble a few words and then poking a metal ring on my third finger? Would it change us, one single bit?"

"It would change everything," he contended, amazed at what seemed sheer paganism in her. Once more she fell to studying his face. In it, apparently, she read all the arguments which his tongue had failed to utter, for her own milky brow was slowly clouded with a frown of thought.

"Krassler would kill me," she said, as much to herself as to the man beside her.

"What has Krassler got to do with it?" quickly countered the other.

That question appeared to be no easy one to answer. It seemed to involve a studious turning of the matter over and over in her mind.

"Can't you see, Owen, what Krassler's doing for me? He's trying to make me into an actress. He says he's giving me the chance of a lifetime. He says he'll pitch me head-first into Broadway if I'll only put myself in his hands. He even claims he can make me a star, inside of two seasons."

"What do you mean by 'putting yourself in his hands'?"

She was, apparently, making it a point to be very patient with him.

"I mean doing my work, my part, the way he wants it done, the way it ought to be done."

"I imagine there are more Krasslers than one in this city," retorted Storrow, embittered by some incongruous sudden sense of estrangement between him and the woman so close to him.

"That's where you're wrong," she amended. "There's only one Krassler. I may be empty-headed, but I've brains enough to see that. If I can ever do anything on the stage it's only because he's standing behind me. He knows acting, every trick and move of

it. He makes me feel that I'm only a mask and that it's his spirit stepping inside that mask and doing what I ought to. He holds me up where I'd go down in two minutes."

It discomfited Storrow to find his own inner conclusions thus openly reiterated.

"There seem to be several hundred that Krassler isn't holding up, as you put it."

"But don't you see, Owen, that I'm different? Acting isn't just an instinct; it's an art. It's an art you acquire after years of study. And what chance have I ever had to study it that way? What training do you ever get out of stage dancing and show-girl parts? What good does a few seasons of being a clothes-horse or a front-line jumping-jack ever do you for real art, for real acting? And I hate the very thought of having to go back to that sort of thing."

"But you'll never have to go back to that sort of thing," asserted the man at her side, resenting even this sudden and solemn attitude towards an art which he had never been taught to accept as a serious one.

There was an air of luxuriousness in her slow movement on the bed.

"You'd find me a very expensive luxury," she said, smiling for the first time.

"I'm willing to face that," he retorted.

"But would it be fair for me to ask you to face it?" she asked. "We've both got our work, and we both ought to be free to follow it."

"I'm not asking," he contended, "for any surrender of freedom. What I want you to do it for is really to get our freedom back to us, to get our feet on solid ground so we can use our hands or our heads when we feel the need for it."

She seemed unable to follow his line of thought.

"Then what is it you want?" she asked, once more with a wrinkled brow.

"*You!*" was his reply.

The weariness went out of her face at the *vibrata* of feeling which had crept into that one expository cry.

"But you can have me, Beloved One, for the asking, every ounce of my body and soul. It's all yours!"

"That's not enough," he surprised her by replying.

"That would seem a great deal to most men," she told him, after a moment of silence.

"Then you'll have to regard me as different to most men," he persisted.

"In what way?"

"In wanting to keep our love sane and clean and holy," he found himself saying. "In not having it dragged down to any Muselli and Nona Maynelle plane — and ending as you saw theirs end."

She sat up, thinking this over.

"I'm afraid, Owen, I'm more of a barbarian than you are. It doesn't seem the least bit important to me, so long as we're true to each other, whether we've scratched our names in some fat old city clerk's register or not. That may make"—

"Then if it's that trivial to you," he interrupted, "why can't you respect my wishes in the matter?"

"But it's not so trivial, in one way. There's my work to think of. People aren't interested in a married stage-star. They're not, at least, unless she's a great artist, and I know well enough I'm not that, and never can be. And Krassler would never stand for it, even from the business view-point. It would end everything."

"Then why not let it, if that's the absurd condition it imposes on you?" he demanded through the dust of his own cyclonic upheavals. He failed to decipher latent reproof in the quick look which she threw at him over her shoulder.

"Are you making this," she said with an arrested judicial note in her voice, "a choice between you or my work?"

"They shouldn't have anything to do with each other," he countered. "There's nothing I'm asking you to give up, except an endless chain of evasions and humiliations and sacrifices of self-respect. And I don't see how those things can help any woman in her work!"

She inspected him with a half-humorous forbearance. Smiling resignedly, she slipped down between the tumbled covers, with a series of small movements touched with impatience, as though to banish discomfort of the mind in deliberately achieved comfort of the body. Then she reached languidly out and took possession of Storrow's hand.

"Stop worrying over trifles, Honey!"

He drew back, freeing his hand.

"But this thing has to be settled," he averred. "Will you marry me?"

She opened her eyes again.

"Come here," she whispered. "No — closer. Still closer. . . . Do you love me?"

"You know I do."

"But you must say it. Say it and say it again. Tell it to me in some different way. I don't seem to care what happens when I hear you say that. *Do* you love me?"

She turned about, heavily, with her hands clinging to his shoulders, so that his stooping body was brought closer to hers. "Do you love me?" she reiterated, with his head clasped against the hollow of her shoulder. She held him there, hungrily. And under the invisible batteries of the old appeal the old capitulation once more took place. He told her, with a sudden flare-back of passion, that he loved her better than life itself, that life without her would mean nothing, that he wanted her as no man had ever before wanted woman.

"Then I'll marry you," she told him with a sigh of moderated surrender. "But there's one thing you must promise me, Owen."

"What is that?"

"For the next few months at least no one must know."

He was less ready to accede to this than she had expected.

"But you can't keep it from being known," he explained. "It has to go on a public record and be announced."

"Then we'll have to slip over to Jersey and have it done there," she told him.

"But don't you have to live in that state a certain length of time before you can get a license?" he asked, disturbed by the air of the illicit clustering about what he had already accepted as a movement toward rehabilitation.

"No, not in Jersey. I'm almost sure of that. But if I'm wrong we'll have to find a state where you don't. And I won't use my stage-name of 'Throssel,' but my own name of Roder, Millie Roder. And that ought to pretty well cover up the tracks."

"Yes, it ought to pretty well cover up the tracks," he admitted with a flash of antagonism which he was not quite able to suppress.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

TORRIE THROSSEL'S marriage to Owen Storrow took place one rainy day early in October. It took place under conditions which were anything but exhilarating, proving of a nature that tended to persuade the groom that Torrie's original attitude towards such ceremonies was not altogether an absurd one. From those moments which were to bring a wife to his arms he was able to extract scant suggestion of a goddess stepping from a cloud, scant semblance to a rare and beautiful rite being beautifully consummated.

Over it all, in the first place, was an inalienable taint of the surreptitious. It carried with it, in fact, the stubborn and disturbing sense of a smuggling expedition somewhat hastily planned and somewhat lugubriously carried out. Storrow, as he stared out the rain-streaked window of his day-coach on a side-line in New Jersey, with Torrie veiled and apprehensive-eyed at his elbow, found it hard to accept the expedition as something not in defiance of the law but in accord with it. They had taken advantage of her more or less tenuous friendship with a friend of a friend of a justice of the peace, in a remoter town, who had announced his willingness to make things smooth for them, though this involved a none too inviting train-trip, a tiresome wait at a junction-point, a stupidly prolonged tour of investigation in a dripping and odoriferous "cab," and a half hour of solemn jocularity and dissimulated high tension in an unspeakably disordered and stuffy office which smelt of mouldy calf-skin and stale tobacco inextricably blended.

All this Torrie endured with a thoughtful-eyed alertness through which the sensitized Storrow probed in vain for some touch of reproof. Her face was whiter than usual, he noticed, when he slipped the ring on her finger. This same finger, he even found to his surprise, was shaking a little. And on the way back to the city, in a day-coach which was as chilly as the earlier one had been overheated, the same momentary pallor overtook her as she drew the ring from her finger and tucked it away in one corner of her leather hand-bag.

"You shouldn't do that."

"Why not?" she asked.

"They say it's bad luck," he reminded her.

"I'm yours, Honey, whether it's on or off," she said as she crowded up closer to him. That movement was apparently undertaken for the sake of warmth, both of the body and mind. He stared down at her, oppressed by the wintriness of her smile. Then a surge of pity went through him, pity for her at his sheer incompetence to engineer any ray of splendour into a situation from which women instinctively expected splendour. He took possession of her hand, hungrily, and held it close in his, under a fold of his raincoat, wondering how, in the days to come, he could compensate her for that loss. He remembered that she had even forbidden him to send flowers to her room and had shrunk from his suggestion of a dinner in state at one of the Fifth Avenue hotels. They could have all that, she contended, later on. And in the meantime she had *him*.

Once home again, however, Torrie found a note under her door, a masculine scrawl of a note from Krassler reminding her that her two stage gowns had to be decided on that afternoon and that Madame Kavoni could not be kept later than five. This meant a hurried call for a taxi, a hurried kiss and hug in the half-lighted hallway, and an incredibly desolate remainder of the day for the mood-swept Storrow.

At seven a messenger-boy appeared with a note from Torrie explaining that she could not get back for dinner as an evening rehearsal had been ordered. It might last to any old hour in the morning, she went on to say, and in the meantime she would snatch a bite on the wing and think of him every moment until they could be together again.

This message left Storrow in a none too happy frame of mind. Already, he saw, there were forces gnawing at the bands with which he had tried to tie Torrie the closer to him, forces which left even marriage altogether in the background. And yet, he kept telling himself, the situation had arisen through no fault of his wife's. She, in all likelihood, was quite as miserable over it as her husband, if the realization that she was the possessor of a husband had yet crept home to her.

Still swayed by a restlessness which seemed beyond his control, he went out to dinner. He ate alone, oppressed for the first time since his advent to the city by a consciousness of his isolation. Then he just as moodily wandered along Forty-Second Street to Broadway and its hectoring sky-signs, pausing with the crowd before the shuttling street-traffic of Times Square. With eyes that were idle and not altogether free of antagonism, he edged back against the curb to make way for a limousine which admitted of no argument as it imperiously cut the corner. Then his diffused resentment focussed into a sudden startled stare, for in that limousine he clearly caught sight of Torrie and Herman Krassler.

He watched the car sweep down Seventh Avenue. His first quick flush of resentment gave way to a feeling of humiliation which he found it hard to define and equally hard to master. What impressed him most was the frank enjoyment on Krassler's face. And the more he thought of this the more a slowly enlarging suspicion grew up in his mind. He dreaded to formulate that sus-

picion. But the wings of it carried him back to an earlier scene in *The Alwyn Arms.*

He was half way home, in fact, before he even dignified his unworded fears by making a movement to end them, or if the worst came to the worst, to confirm them. Turning in at a pay-station, he called up the theatre where he knew Krassler's company usually rehearsed, and making his inquiry as curt and casual as he was able, asked if a rehearsal of *The Seventh Wave* was taking place there tonight. This theatre, it was promptly explained to him over the wire, was housing a company of its own, with an evening performance under way. *The Seventh Wave* people could be found rehearsing down at Acorn Hall, somewhere on lower Seventh Avenue.

Storrow, as he continued his way homeward, found clearing skies above him. He had been foolish, of course. There was nothing tragic in the fact that Krassler had given Torrie a lift in his car. That was an accident, and nothing more, an unconsidered emergency cropping up in the course of the day's work. It was his own fool's readiness to resentment that could be called the tragic part of the thing.

But, alone in his studio that night, Storrow gave a great deal of thought to the situation immediately confronting him. He also arrived at a number of decisions. One of them was that Torrie would have to give up Vibbard's studio. He had no intention of seeing his wife dependent on an outsider for even a temporary place of abode. And later on, he also decided, he would see to it that Torrie gave up the stage. He would settle down and work hard, Storrow told himself, and that would make smaller any sacrifices which Torrie might have to face. For, as she had said, the only thing that really counted was whether they loved each other or not. That was the vital thing, and of that, thank Heaven, he nursed no shadow of doubt.

He reached out, absently, and picked up from his table the silver backed hair-brush which Torrie, with her light-hearted contempt for orderliness, had left between his books. He turned it over and over in his hands. As he held the brush closer to his face he caught from it the heavy capillary odour that seemed suddenly able to visualize her before him. It prompted him to look at his watch, again and still again, wondering when Torrie would get back.

It was two o'clock in the morning when Torrie returned. She came in quietly, tired but triumphant, with her habitual little coo of delight as she discovered that Storrow had waited up for her. But she did not run to him with her equally habitual wing-flutter of the arms, as he had half-expected her to do. She stood arrested and a little chilled by the solemnity on his face.

"It's an awful hour, isn't it?" she said as she unspeared her hat and tossed it to one side. "I thought they were never going to get through the thing."

"How did you get home?" asked Storrow, without looking at her.

"In a yellow taxi with Mattie Crowder," explained Torrie as she looked about for a cigarette. "Krassler said he'd give me a lift this far, but I preferred the taxi."

"And were you able to snatch a bite on the wing?" he next inquired, with an obliquity of which he was secretly ashamed. She stopped short in the act of lighting her cigarette, studying her husband with impersonal yet meditative eyes. Then she laughed a little.

"It was more than a bite, Owen, after all. That man made me eat with him. He said it was his only chance to go over a number of points he wanted to make plain to me. There were two or three of the big men there to look us over, and Krassler didn't want me to fall down at what was almost my first public performance."

Storrow found the last of the fog, the thin but chilling

fog which had kept returning to his valley of moodiness, whisked away into the upper airs of reasonableness.

"And how did you get along?" he asked with a relenting smile of interest. Torrie sat for a moment thinking over this question.

"Oh, I don't know," she finally replied. "I tried hard enough, but it's all so new to me. I got tired in the last act and couldn't make my voice carry the way I wanted to. And the whole piece didn't go the way Krassler had expected."

Storrow, staring at her face, realized that for all her air of suppressed excitement she was utterly tired out.

"Poor kid!" he murmured as he reached for her hand. She seemed to have been awaiting some such signal or movement from him, for the tension went out of her body and the blankness out of her eyes. She did not get up from her chair, but pushed it on its heavy castors so that it stood close beside his. From this position she could lean across the padded chair-arm against his shoulder.

"Be good to me!" she pleaded. The note of wistfulness in her voice reminded him that she had been placed there at his side for protection, for sustainment. They were both, apparently, very much alone in the world, lost in the heart of a turbid and preoccupied city. They were also, to all intents and purposes, without antecedents, without relatives and family interests to consider. Such interests, on such a day, would have loomed large on the horizon, would have made themselves momentous in that furtive suburban ceremony which already seemed something faded and far-away. And this prompted Storrow to wonder if their own speedy return to the earlier state of things, leaving so little to show for their hurried journey into New Jersey, was the reason that their marriage was already appearing so remote and so phantasmal.

Torrie was still too wide awake to think of sleeping. So they made Swiss cheese sandwiches and drank bottled

beer together. Storrow felt, at first, that Torrie's facetiousness was a trifle forced. But this he finally put down to over-strained nerves. She seemed so childishly happy to be with him again that he decided to postpone all his carefully thought out arguments and ultimatums until a time more fitting. Yet it struck him as odd that she said nothing about their marriage, that it seemed so little in her mind. Her only reference to it, in fact, was as oblique as it was unpremeditated.

"No one can stop me from doing that now," she had proclaimed as she held his head pressed against her bosom and left the taste of beer and cheese on his upturned mouth. Whereupon she lapsed into silence, with a small frown of trouble on her half-shadowed face.

"Then do it again," he said to banish the frown. And she repeated the act more abundantly than before.

"Oh, Lover, Lover!" she murmured, contentedly, like a note of music struck from drowsy strings.

It was almost noon, the next day, when Storrow wakened. It took some time to shake off the sense of guilt aroused by hours so unseemly for a worker, since thereafter he intended to be a worker. The fact that Torrie was already one of that guild served as a goad to his restless spirit, so that in his moments of abstraction his mind harped back to the laying out of his novel, fretting about it as a farm collie frets about a woodchuck hole. Torrie, he realized for the first time, would always want to sleep late. This, he also realized, meant that his mornings would be lost, unless he had a corner of his own to work in. And above all things he wanted to get his teeth set on the bone of invention while the appetite to create was strong within him and the demands to justify existence were rigorous about him.

Then he no longer thought about himself. Instead, he sat up in bed and stared down at the still sleeping woman beside him. It could always hold his attention, that sleeping face, touched with a mystery that was sec-

ond only to the mystery of death. And she slept as peacefully and abandonedly as a child. Her lips, slightly parted, were red and viscid, the foreshortened lines curving into what looked like a pout of protesting childishness. He could see the steady pulse-beat in the hollow of the white neck and the ramified blue veining in the dusky eyelids where the faint fan-like tracery of the laughter-lines gave a countering touch of maturity to the face. Yet the entire attitude of the relaxed body impressed him as one of trust, of trust in him, of trust in some sterner force to which it had forlornly surrendered. It was, after all, he himself who was the guardian of that softly rising and subsiding machinery of life. And leaning closer, he brooded over it with an impulse of tenderness which he could not articulate. She was something more, he tried to tell himself, than a wave washed up the shore of his desire. She was, fundamentally and primordially, his mate, his life partner. And there was no trace of carnality in the kiss, light as a feather-touch, with which he brushed the upturned point of her bare shoulder. She stirred and turned a little, with an indrawn breath that was almost a sigh, and then lapsed back into unbroken slumber. Storrow, holding his breath, moved slowly and cautiously away and finally slipped out of bed, guarding each movement to make sure that he was not awakening her. Later, disturbed by the chilliness of the room from the opened window, he tiptoed to the bedside and softly drew the tumbled coverings up about her shoulders. Then he as quietly tiptoed away again.

Storrow, when Torrie wakened, was hard at work, with an empty coffee-cup beside him and an ever-increasing array of written sheets before him. The determination to create, as he sounded the possibilities of his long-nursed romance of the North-land, merged into a fever to create. But it was stiff labour, that manipulation of

a new medium, and involved a concentration tending to leave him unconscious of time and place. Torrie, with eyes still heavy from sleep, stared at him for a puzzled moment or two, murmured: "You old ink-coolie!" and slipped away for her bath. Storrow, all the while, was far off in the sub-Arctics, unconscious of those ablutionary sounds which had once so held his attention, oblivious to Torrie's return in her heelless Turkish slippers and loose-fitting bath-robe. It was actual hunger more than her movements about the room that finally brought him out of his trance.

They prepared their meal together, in Storrow's kitchenette which camp-life had taught him to keep orderly. Every woodsman, he explained to Torrie as he presided over skillet and coffee-pot with a quiet dexterity which startled her, had to learn to cook. There were no restaurants and delicatessen-shops in the Barren Grounds. Torrie, girdling up her loose robe until the white ankles showed above the Turkish slippers, brought the matutinal newspaper and milk and rolls from the studio door, and went about laying the table for two, crooning as she worked.

They ate side by side, with Torrie's arm across the back of her husband's chair. They ate, in fact, with the honest appetites of the healthy young animals they were, and when they had finished they sat with their slippered feet up on the radiator-top and the grey coils of cigarette-smoke slowly ascending to the skylight.

"It's a great life if you don't weaken," contentedly remarked Torrie with her head against Storrow's shoulder, repeating a Broadway catch-line of the day.

"What'll make us weaken?" demanded Storrow, not understanding the allusion.

That question, however, remained unanswered. For almost as it was uttered the studio door opened and a pert young figure in grey came to a sudden standstill.

"Hully gee!" she said aloud as she surveyed the two figures on the far side of the room. "Here's where I beat it!"

"Pannie," cried Torrie sharply, as the intruder started to back out through the still open door. And Pannie, with a stare of comprehension still on her sophisticated young face, came to a stop.

The three stood there, in a moment of constrained silence across which unspoken questions and retorts seemed to flash like heat-lightning.

"Tell her," Torrie suddenly commanded Storrow. And Storrow told her, inwardly irritated at the discovery that his words seemed more a confession than an announcement.

"You nuts! You two nuts!" cried Pannie, in the language of her world. "But if you've didded it, I s'pose I've gotta kiss you both!" And this Pannie proceeded to do, considerably to Storrow's discomfort, for it was a brazen and full-blooded smack which she planted on his lips. This, indeed, she threatened to repeat, but Torrie, with a pretence at indignation, tore her away.

"That belongs to me," she said with her habitual and throaty little coo of happiness, as she walled Storrow's body off with her outstretched arms.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DURING the week that ensued the new interpreter of the North-land found time a-plenty to give to his work. Torrie was surprisingly little at home. Her day, and sometimes half her night, seemed filled with rehearsals and fittings and photographers and ever-revised preparations for a two-week try-one of *The Seventh Wave* "on the road." Yet even the preoccupied Storrow was able to garner a hint or two that things were not going as smoothly with the new production as they should.

Nor did he find the approach to his own new venture altogether plain sailing. He was doubly anxious to escape failure, not only because it was the first step in a new field, but also because it seemed success alone that could now justify existence for him. He was not sorry, accordingly, when at the tail end of a day of hard work Chester Hardy dropped in to see how he was getting along.

"That's the only answer to your question," retorted Storrow, pointing none too hopefully at the pile of manuscript that lay before him, confronted by that bareness of the horizon which comes after supreme endeavour.

Hardy, at a nod from the other, took up the scattered sheets and tamped their edges methodically together.

"In the first place," he said, "get a typewriter. Script is too hard to read and too slow to write, for these busy times." Then he sat silent, with his keen and slightly faded eye rowelling over line after line. Storrow sat watching him, more anxious than he would have been

willing to admit. For he knew that whatever happened, Hardy would tell him the truth. But for a half-hour without movement or gesture Hardy continued to pore over the pages. And no word of approval escaped him as he put them down.

"In the second place," he resumed as though he had been speaking but a moment before, "while you've explained the presence of your city girl in the wilderness satisfactorily enough, why hang crêpe on the front door by killing off her father in your very first chapter? He isn't essential to your story, either dead or alive, and in this work you've got to keep down to essentials. Then when your man pulls the girl out of the rapids, after the entire outfit is wrecked, have her as naked, or as next to naked, as he is himself, the way you first said you were going to do it."

"But as I worked it out it seemed sure to shock people's sensibilities," explained Storrow.

"Don't let cowardice edge you away from your theme," bruskly persisted the older man. "If what you've got seems like the truth, say it, and let the sensibilities take care of themselves. You intend to show your two people reverting suddenly to Adam and Eve conditions. And if you keep clothes on 'em you don't get 'em back to the Adam and Eve age at all. Strip 'em, my boy, strip 'em bare to the bone, and let 'em learn to take care of their nakedness of soul in the same way they're taking care of their nakedness of body. That's your theme, and that's what'll carry you through."

"But *will* it carry me through?" asked Storrow, trying to keep the question down to the plane of the commonplace.

Hardy knew the hope that lay ambuscaded in that seemingly casual query. He knew also the difficulties that beset the way of the artist not yet accustomed to the edged tools of creation. And he was sincere enough to be honest.

"I can't answer that until you've rounded out your structure a little more. But you've got a basic idea that is arresting, that is arresting even to me — and I can assure you I'm a sad-eyed old dog at this business of inspecting stories. Then you've got a new field, and ground that you know. So take advantage of that. Be definite. Be graphic and concrete. Don't be afraid to describe exactly how your master of woodcraft makes that wilderness soap for the lady. And tell exactly how they cured and sewed together that rabbit-skin suit of hers, and make it quite plain how they prepared the fish-bone needles and the cedar-root thread. You have him keep her warm, that first night after the rescue, by burying her in the down from bull-rushes. I'm not naturalist enough to know whether this could be done or not, but it sounds amazingly poetic. I'm inclined to think, on the whole, that it would take an incredible number of bull-rush heads to inter the lady."

"You're wrong," explained Storrow, now on ground that he was sure of. "There are coulées in the country where I'm laying this action carpeted with bull-rushes. I've seen them thick enough to fill a hay-rack with down in an hour's work. They're so plentiful that the Indians dry and grind the bulbs for a kind of flour. Tomorrow, in fact, I intend to have my man explain the process to his mate."

"Good!" proclaimed Hardy. "Give 'em all of that stuff you can crowd in, all the wild-life and wood-craft material you've got to use. For that's what'll carry you over. And that's not only your individual note, your distinctive note, in this case, but it's the stuff that city people crave."

When Hardy took his departure, leaving Storrow like a cub-lion with his first taste of blood, he went with a renewed and more complicated interest in the young Canadian who was showing more changes than the mere loss of the woodland tan. Hardy, in prospecting the

casual lodes of curiosity, had unearthed what promised to prove the more precious metal of efficiency. There was a chance, if he kept his head, that the stranger from the North might eventually win out. And in that final winning out, if it was to be brought about, Hardy had a sincere and far from selfish wish to be a factor.

Hardy returned, before the end of the week, with a smile of approval for both the newly installed typewriter and the newly completed chapters. There were, of course, criticisms to be proffered and changes to be suggested and timely hints to be thrown out. The younger author, in fact, was governed by these much more than he imagined. He had reached the stage, by this time, where he felt that he could stand alone. So there was much talk and argument and clash of theory against theory, but it ended, as a rule, in Storrow's tacit submission to the older man's will.

"The first rule of art," that older man had averred, "is to escape dulness." At another time he had declared: "It's only work, remember, that can efface the footsteps of work." And as though to confirm this attitude he carried away bodily all of Storrow's manuscript that could be spared, "to chew over at his leisure," as he expressed it.

"I want you to make good on this, young man," he went on to explain, "for this United States of ours, you'll find, has mighty small sympathy with failure, no matter how romantic the attendant circumstances may be."

Storrow, under this kindly lash of encouragement, worked harder than ever. Even Torrie acquired a qualified respect for his preoccupation and fell to complaining of his absentmindedness.

"Hello, old book-worm!" was her greeting as she came into his studio one morning to dry her hair over his radiator. She was in *négligé*,— that, he began to see, was a habit which women of the stage found imposed

upon them — and as she sat leaning forward with her still damp hair cascading down over the metal of the warm radiator he stared absently at the accidental gleam of the bare white shoulder in the strong side light. The sight of that smooth and milky texture always stirred in him a vague longing to return to his modelling.

"Torrie," he abstractedly inquired, "just how'd you ever come to have that wonderful skin?"

She lifted a corner of the dusky mane shadowing her face and looked at him. Then, having made sure there was no mockery in his eyes, she massaged a satiny shoulder with meditative finger-tips.

"I was born with it, Honey-Bun," she explained, "the same as you were born with those wide shoulders of yours. Mother used to have exactly the same skin. Even up to the week she died she was as pink and white as a baby."

He remembered, as he went back to his work, that he knew startlingly little of her antecedents, of her own earlier life. Human beings, after all, were enigmas to other human beings. And with that half-formulated deduction he re-entered the rustling forest of his imagination and rounded up the scattered voices of creation.

So immersed was he in his work that when a few minutes later a knock sounded on his door he called out an abstracted "Come in." He looked up to see Hardy with a bundle of manuscript on his threshold and Torrie with a cry of protest diving for the communicating-door.

Hardy beheld that vanishing white-shouldered figure, imperious in line as the Flying Victory, and somewhere deep in his unparticipating eyes Storrow thought he detected a look that savoured of contempt. He resented that look, and found his resentment double-edged at the thought that it was not definite enough to combat. Yet at the same time a vague dread of finding it, or what it must have stood for, translated into actual and irretrievable words prompted him to speak.

"We were married last week, Torrie Throssel and I!"

He saw Hardy wheel about as though he had been shot.

"Good God!" gasped the man holding the manuscript under his arm, with a foolish look of vacuity on his face. The next moment, however, he seemed once more master of himself, excepting only a slow flush of embarrassment which stained the lean and slightly lined cheek as Storrow stood in front of him, challenging his gaze by one equally deliberate.

"That seems to startle you," parried the younger man, with a note of harshness in his voice.

"Naturally," said the other, willing to give ground until his shock had been digested.

"Is there anything so dreadful about a thing like that?" Storrow found himself driven into demanding.

Hardy, by this time, was able to laugh a little. But it was a laugh marked by neither merriment nor ease.

"But you shouldn't fling a thing like this slap-bang into the face of your friends," he protested with a ponderable effort at lightness. "Marriage, my boy, is momentous. It's about the biggest gun in the battle of life. And when you find it going off right under your nose this way, it's naturally going to make you jump a little!"

Storrow, grim of lip, nursed no intention of making the situation any easier for his unhappy guest.

"You've known Torrie for some time?" he half inquired and half suggested.

Guarded as Hardy stood, he could not keep a barricaded look from showing in his eyes.

"Yes; I've known her. But never, naturally, as you must know her."

"Do you like her or dislike her?"

This inquisitorial proceeding, however, was no longer palatable to the cool-headed man of letters. He laughed openly this time.

"Since you do," he acknowledged, "it's surely my duty to fall in line with the others."

"The others — what others?" Storrow demanded with unexpected sharpness.

"Torrie, I think, has many friends," patiently explained Hardy as he put the bundle of manuscript down on the table beside him. The movement was plainly a dismissive one. And the quietness of the older man had already begun to awaken in Storrow a suspicion that he himself had been ridiculous, that he might be straining the bonds of friendship beyond reason. Yet along the ramparts of his suspicion paced a ghostlike and all too familiar thought. If Torrie was beautiful to him, she must have appeared beautiful to others. And always there would be that undefined uncertainty of the past, that equally unformulated threat of the future, since what made her precious also made her perilous.

He sat down, heavily, staring at the waxed floor between his feet. It was Hardy who spoke first.

"Haven't you been pegging away a little too hard at this?" he asked with a hand-movement towards the manuscript.

Storrow, scenting that effort at extenuation, laughed a little.

"I seem to be developing temperament, don't I?" he suggested, not without a touch of bitterness.

"And *not* developing muscle," countered the older man. "A man of your bulk has got to use his body. You've got to keep hard in a flat as well as in the forest. And I think I'll lead you around to the Racquet Club gym where you can work the acid out of your system and freshen up with a plunge every afternoon."

"I'm not quite sure where the acid is," acknowledged Storrow.

"A squash-court will pretty soon show you," was the other's retort.

"Then let's leave it until I get this cleared away a

little more," requested Storrow with a nod towards his work-table.

"And we'll leave our talk about these opening chapters," added Hardy, once more on his feet, "until some other morning when we both have more time."

He left Storrow oppressed by a sense of reservation studiously sustained and of judgments over-considerately withheld. Yet the moment the door had closed on that departing guest the inner door opened and Torrie stood confronting him.

"Well, you've spilt the beans, haven't you?" she cried with a note that was quite new to Storrow. It was the first time he had seen anger at him convulse her face. It took the luminous draperies out of her eyes, leaving them as flat and bald as the windows of an empty house. It betrayed a tendency to leave the full-blooded lips more square in line, giving them a slight appearance of looseness.

"Spilt the beans?" he repeated, amazed beyond measure by the unexpected antagonism in her eyes.

"Why did you tell that man we'd been married?" demanded the Medea with the loosened hair.

"Didn't you tell Pannie Atwill?" countered her still mystified husband.

"Pannie Atwill's a friend of mine," was the quick retort.

"Well, Chester Hardy's a friend of mine," announced Storrow with an ascending note of challenge in his voice.

"But he's no friend of mine," declared the angry-eyed Torrie. "And it was clearly understood between us that nothing was to be said about my marriage."

"Are you ashamed of it?" asked Storrow with acidulated coldness.

"I'm ashamed of *you,*" she shot back at him, "for not respecting my wishes, and my interests."

"I wish you'd explain just what interests are likely to suffer."

She did not reply to that taunt, since beneath all its quietness of tone it was a taunt. She was too intent in following her own unhappy lanes of thought.

"You might as well have put it in the *Morning Telegraph* as pass it out to Chester Hardy."

"I don't see why it shouldn't be put in the *Morning Telegraph,* for that matter."

"If it is," she flung out, "it ought to go in the obituary column."

"Is it that fatal?" he flung back.

"The fatal part is being a fool and not knowing it."

He rose from his chair at that, flushing up to the forehead. Yet he was able to stand and study her with coldly appraising eyes. He noticed, for the first time, that there was an animal like heaviness about her outthrust face and a touch of coarseness in the hair of Indian-like straightness. Yet even through the fog of belligerency that drifted and hung between them she struck him as being in some way pathetic, as being incongruously and pitifully in need of succour, as being alone in empty wastes to which he ought to reach out a sustaining hand.

"Torrie," he said, trying to speak calmly but not quite succeeding in doing so, "it seems to me we're not starting out right."

"It most decidedly does," she promptly agreed.

"There are certain things we've got to face," he went on with self-imposed deliberateness, "and we may as well face them right now."

"I don't think I've got time to be preached at," she declared, with a lip-curl of scorn. She seemed suddenly and bewilderingly remote from him. Yet even in that moment of tension he wondered if women who led careers of their own, if women who were economically independent, were not to be made allowances for in their pursuit of personal liberty.

"It's not a question of preaching. It's a question of decency."

"On my part, Sir Manfred?" she mockingly demanded. "Or on yours?"

"On yours," he said, solemn with the consciousness of approaching crisis. "I want you to give up that Vibbard studio, and give it up at once."

She stood for a moment of utter silence, as though startled by the direction in which his masterfulness was expressing itself. Then the scorn once more mounted to her angry eyes.

"You've certainly picked a queen of a time to drag me into your cage!" she called out with a new shrillness in her voice.

"Do you regard it as a cage?" he asked, wincing in spite of himself at a coarseness of fibre which seemed capable of hurting him more than all her anger.

"It will be if I go into it under any such circumstances as these," she recklessly proclaimed.

He felt like a stone-mason with his skiest scaffolding giving way.

"And you intend to stay out of it?" he demanded, tingling in the face of what he knew to be an ultimatum.

"I intend to remain a human being," she hotly retorted as she reached for the door behind her, "with the prerogatives of a human being." With that she stepped through the door into the Vibbard studio and swung it thunderously shut behind her.

Storrow stood looking after her. She had said "perrogatives," he inappositely remembered. And that seemed to leave the thing more tragically unjust than ever.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IT was late at night when Storrow returned to his studio after a day of restless wandering about the city that seemed without vistas and vision. The dregs of his trivially momentous quarrel with Torrie still lay sour at the bottom of his heart. He unlocked his door, tired of body and listless in spirit. He was startled, on stepping into the studio, to find his reading lamp switched on. He was still further startled to find Torrie huddled up in his big arm-chair of faded green velour.

She did not look up as he stood before her, and for a moment, as he studied the relaxed figure and the drooping head with its tumbled hair, he thought that she had fallen asleep. Then he caught the sound of an unmistakable small sob. It was a sound that bewildered him at the same time that it devastated him, for he had never learned to associate Torrie with tears. She had always seemed to him too vital and too strong-willed for any such surrender. And he waited, shocked into silence, wondering as to the cause of this relapse. The wait was a long one. But it was finally broken by Torrie herself.

"I've been an awful fool, Owen," she said quickly, without lifting her face. But the note of contrition in that acknowledgment was too much for him. Before it he felt his ice walls of injured pride melt away. She was holding out one hand to him, blindly, still without the courage, apparently, to face him, still with her head bent low over the faded green chair-arm. So he dropped on his knee beside her, catching the groping hand in his, with a sudden tightening of the throat and an equally prompt relaxation of the iron hoops about his heart.

"Beloved," he whispered, amazed at the miraculous *débâcle* of the emotions which lay beyond his power either to withhold or control.

She reached out for him and clung to him with little gasps, half hungrily, half triumphantly. Her nose, red with crying, looked pointed and pinched. And there was a meekness in her demeanour which he had never before seen there.

"I was wrong," she acknowledged, studying his face with her bloodshot eyes.

"We were both wrong," he largely conceded, with a taste of brine in the kisses which he pressed against her wet lashes.

"But you must never make me angry, Honey," she said, hiding her head on his shoulder. "It makes me say things and do things I'm sorry for afterwards."

He found at the core of that acknowledgment something keenly able to disturb him.

"What have you done?" he asked, trying to make the question a casual one.

"I've done what you wanted me to," she told him.

"What?" he repeated.

"I've given up that room. I've given up everything."

"Everything?" he echoed.

"All I want is you," she maintained, still clinging to him.

"But what have you given up?" he still insisted, apprehensive before the unknown.

She sat back in the wide-armed chair, mopping the pointed red nose with her tiny damp rag of a handkerchief. Her face was heavy, with its last look of youth vanished.

"I'm not going on with that stage work," she announced.

This was more than he had looked for, more than he had reason to expect.

"Do you mean you've quarrelled with Krassler?" he

heard himself demanding, with that prospect too obviously anything but a disturbing one.

Torrie shook her head.

"The whole thing's been taken off. The Seiberts said the play hadn't a chance for Broadway, and there was a dispute about bookings. Then the backer refused to put up the last two thousand dollars for costumes and Krassler said *that* was the straw that broke the camel's back."

Storrow's relief, at this acknowledgment, was overcast by a colouring of disappointment in the discovery that the return to the *status quo* had not been as entirely a voluntary one as it had promised. But it was a big cloud, he remembered, which hung above Torrie. Yet it was clearly one with a silver lining, from his point of view. And she in time would come to see it as he saw it.

"Do you feel bad about this?" he finally asked her. Her attitude, as she sat readjusting the hair-pins in her thick crown of hair, took on a touch of the judicial.

"I did, Honey, when I couldn't keep from thinking that you hated me," she said as she stood up and shook out her skirts. "And that play may have been rotten, as Lee Seibert said it was. But I wasn't doing my part so rottenly, and Seibert knows it!"

This caused Storrow to look about at her. It was a new note from her, that naïve trumpeting of her own power.

"You mean you've a feeling it might lead him to offering you something else?" he asked.

She hesitated for a moment. Then she swung about with a shrug of abandonment.

"I'm not thinking about it at all. The thing's over. I've got to take my medicine without kicking." Then, arrested by his suddenly sobered face, she added, speaking first quietly and then in a slowly ascending key: "And it's brought us together, Honey, no matter how crazily we may have been acting. All I've got now is my solemn-eyed old Cave-Man — and instead of just get-

ting the crusts of life together, we're going to sit down to the whole blessed big pie! So kiss me, kiss me quick, or I'll start to scream and disgrace you before this whole stifling old building!"

Instead of kissing her, however, he stood staring at her in wonder, alarmed at that strongly rising note of hysteria in her throaty voice. For the first time in his life, indeed, he found himself without any inclination to kiss her. What was more, he quite failed to see what kisses had to do with the situation.

"*Kiss me — quick!*" she commanded.

For the first time, as he turned away from her, he saw the square-faced bottle of dry gin on the table, with the sugar and seltzer and squeezed lemons beside it. She had been drinking, he saw, drinking a good deal more than could be good for her. Not that she was drunk, or even thick-tongued and muddled. He had never seen her in that condition, and he imagined that he never should. But instinct and early training combined to make a woman's use of intoxicants still repulsive to him. The men and women in Torrie's world, he remembered, took a view quite opposite to his, which they would have laughed at as provincial, as smug and mid-Victorian. And that world, in a way, was already his own world. He had entered it and was being made a part of it; and in Rome, he concluded, it was acknowledged best to do what the Romans did. There were still certain aspects of that world which he could not comprehend. Its casual liberties, its freedom of intercourse, its topsy-turvydom of standards, were still a bewilderment to him. Repeatedly he was being confronted by that freemasonry of bohemia which kept warning him there would have to be ever-renewed shifts in the outposts of behaviour, inexplicable contractions at one point and equally inexplicable expansions at another. He dreaded, as all men of sensibilities dread, the accusation of narrowness. Iniquity, he knew, was not peculiar to the city. He had seen

enough of country life to remember that impurity could walk in lilaced lanes as corruptingly as it sidled along lamp-lit pavements. But in the crowded centres it brushed more disconcertingly close to one. And still again he made it a point to remember that he was a newcomer to that great city so contradictory in aspect and so indecipherable in impulse. It was not only too big to be changed; it was also too complex in its blind interweaving of strata for him to choose and cleave to any one particular plane. It was he himself, and not the city, that must change. Yet, inevitable as those changes were, he had no intention of leaving life little more than a mush of concessions. He would always insist on elbow-room for his soul.

And it was becoming more and more difficult, he felt as he crossed to Torrie's side and kissed her for the sake of peace, and purely for the sake of peace, to distinguish between advance and retrogression, between enslavement and emancipation. For just a moment, before he drank down the gin-rickey which she had mixed for him, he entertained a suspicion that his wife's insistence on physical contact was for inflammatory and obliterative ends, to burn up in a flame of passion all traces of more trivial emotion, as the burglar has been known to burn the mansion after ransacking its treasure-chests. But by the time he had finished his second gin-rickey he no longer gave harbourage to such battered suspicions. It was a new world, he told himself, and he was there to make the most of it, to make the most of it with Torrie at his side. And as though to seal that determination, he asked for still another gin-rickey.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

STORROW, in making the most of his new world with Torrie at his side, found a number of things to tax both his patience and his resolution. His studio, in the first place, betrayed symptoms of becoming embarrassingly overcrowded, once the Vibbard apartment had been cleared of his wife's belongings and the communicating door had been duly locked and sealed. Torrie, too, had little of Storrow's sense of orderliness, and sustained application to that work with which he knew life could alone be justified became more and more difficult. Yet he was unable to accuse Torrie of not doing her part. She had imposed on her friends, he grew to understand, a tacit conspiracy of absenteeism, and few indeed were the callers, outside of the irrepressible Pannie Atwill and the persistently loyal Hardy, who came to interrupt them.

It struck Storrow as odd, as the weeks slipped by, that the constraint existing between Torrie and Hardy, instead of diminishing, grew both more active and more observable. He spoke of this one night, after coming home in time to witness Torrie bidding his friend from the Avenue a none too cordial farewell.

"Why don't you learn to like Hardy a little better?" he asked as Torrie proceeded to shake up the cocktails with which they now invariably preceded dinner.

Instead of answering that question Torrie turned and asked him another.

"What does the note of Ecclesiastes mean?" she half-indifferently inquired.

"The note of Ecclesiastes?" he repeated. "Who used that phrase?"

"Chester Hardy did. He seemed to insinuate that that's the note we're going to end up on. He may know what it means, but I don't."

Storrow stopped short.

"What was Hardy talking about?" he demanded.

Torrie, before answering that question, drank down her cocktail.

"As far as I can make out he doesn't seem to think we're suited to each other. He says we look at life from altogether different sides. And he announced to me, Honey Bun, that now you were in my hands, I'd have to treat you as though you were made of Dresden china."

"And what particular business is all that of Hardy's?" asked Storrow out of the silence that had fallen over him.

"That's what I've been wondering," observed Torrie as she handed Storrow his cocktail. He stared down at the thin-shanked glass abstractedly. That, he remembered, was one of Torrie's contributions to their *ménage*. After he had emptied it, still without speaking, he realized that he had been tired in both body and mind.

"By the way, how did you happen to know Hardy?"

Torrie, before answering that question, crossed to the kitchenette and just as slowly returned to the table.

"Doesn't everybody know him? I happened to meet him, the same as other people do."

"When?"

"Two or three years ago," she patiently replied.

"And he's been nothing but a casual friend?"

Torrie, stooping over the table, looked up sharply.

"He's never even been that. What'd interest me in that dried up fish who's always prowling around inspecting people as though they were museum specimens? And I know what's the matter with him at this very moment. He's souring with envy, just plain everyday envy. He

missed his chance of getting any happiness out of life, and he's sore, without knowing it, at seeing us trying to be happy!"

"That dried up fish," Storrow carefully reminded her, "has been a good friend of mine."

"But you can't get away from the fact, Honey, that it was *me* you married. And I intend to come first, no matter what the outsiders may say. And we're going to be happy, aren't we, Owen, no matter what Hardy may imagine?"

"That, I think, depends more on ourselves than on Hardy."

She came and sat on the arm of his chair, apprehensive of returning solemnities.

"If we love each other, my own, it's nobody's business, and nothing matters. But you must love me. You must. I've got to have it. Do you? *Do you?*"

"Of course," he said, capitulating before the barrage of her caresses, at the same moment that he stood conscious of the celerity with which that artillery could always be wheeled into place.

"Then kiss me! No, not that way. *My* way!" Then muffled, through her contented cries of protest, she murmured: "You . . . beloved . . . big . . . brute!"

It was Pannie Atwill who invaded the studio the next night as Storrow sat at a paper-littered work-table absorbed in his story, the loquacious Pannie more loose-jointed than ever. There was something conspicuously uncouth, Storrow saw, even in her newer manner of speech.

"Hello, Torrie, how's tricks? I just gotta get a peek at your map to make sure they haven't planted you over to Greenwood! Hello there, Capt'n Kidd. But gimme a gasper quick or I'll pass away." The next moment her exuberant young lungs were filled with smoke. Then she regarded Storrow out of one corner of her eye. "Say, Torrie, why is that big Woof-Woof of yours so

afraid o' me? No, Shakespeare, don't stop the masterpiece. Keep right on dreamin', for rent-day's on the road and the high cost o' lovin' ain't lowerin' any as far as I can see. But look here, Torrie Throssel, don't you get fat, whatever happens. There ain't no such animal as a perfect thirty-eight, not in our world. And, Dearie, you sure ought to doll up a little, even if that soul-mate o' yours isn't askin' for a pink mesh over the peach-basket."

"Can that!" was Torrie's preoccupied command, keyed down to the plane of Pannie's comprehension. But Pannie was not to be silenced.

"If I owned that book-worm over there I'd make him sit up nights and dig out an Amurrican *C'mill* for me to star in and put that Klennert dame out o' business. What's doin'? Yes, of course; I knew you'd take it serious once you got it. Well, as Donnie Eastman used to say, it's a great life if you keep the lining in! And speakin' o' that toiler reminds me. Donnie took the bunch out to Krebbler's last night, and, believe me, it was some party! The bubble-watter flowed knee-deep. And Demmy Varge Dyckman got doin' her Castle-stunt on the table and we was all put out at three a. m. And Donnie was askin' me what mausoleum you was nailed up in and if you was too dead to sit in a Rolls-Royce some afternoon when the walkin' was heavy. But of course the Big Push over there'd blow up if he thought you was gettin' a lungful of open air. That's men for you!"

"Oh, no it isn't," quickly corrected Torrie through the intervening blue haze of smoke. "It was the state of matrimony I entered, not a state prison."

"What's the difference, Dearie?"

"The difference is that I'm in it because I like it, because I prefer it, and not because I can't escape it."

"Coo on, birdie!" mocked her loquacious visitor. "I was that way once, but he was a plumber and he took to

usin' the pipe-tongs on me. But what I come up to tell you was that I'd given posin' the shake and signed up with *The Girl of Girls* company. And Bennie Veals is sure workin' the feet off'n us in that new beach-dance he brought straight back from H'waya with him. He cussed me today until that Adam's Apple o' his was workin' with a three-inch plunge and ended up by inquirin' if I ever suspected I'd got nothin' north o' my neck-bones. And when we was peelin' back in the duds-room I asked them Broadway fairies if havin' to take langwige like that lyin' down had anything on gettin' goose-flesh doin' the Spring nymph stuff in a draughty studjeo wit' the steam off and the janitor dead at the wheel!"

"Then why do you stay where Veals can treat you that way?" asked Torrie as her husband got up from his chair and walked with a suppressed groan to the window.

"You know what the stage is, Dearie, once you get bit with the bug," remarked Pannie as she turned and inspected the distressed Storrow with an indifferent eye. "Do I disturb you, Homer?" she smilingly inquired.

Storrow swung about on her, stung beyond endurance by that final impertinence.

"Not as much as you disgust me," he cried, seeming to see personified in Pannie all that was abhorrent in the new life into which he was so insidiously being elbowed.

Pannie, digging a rouge-stick from her hand-bag and passing it imperturbably across her tips, continued to survey her host with contemptuously appraising eyes.

"Sweeten up, old top, or that grouch'll be takin' you back to where the caribou graze," she had the effrontery to assert.

It was uttered lightly enough, that careless taunt of a slangy chorus-girl, but it struck sharp as an arrow-point against the nettled flank of consciousness. It awakened in Storrow's mind his first faint spark of longing for

that saner world of peace and open spaces which was now denied him. It made him think of an arching sky of robin-egg blue, of steel-grey waters lapping against lichened rocks, of pine-clad ridges black against the setting sun, of the sound of the wind through spruce and fir, and the smell of burning tamarack. And for the first time, deep in the core of his heart, he nursed a vague but unmistakable regret for other days.

"I don't think Pannie deserved that," reproved Torrie when the apparently unperturbed Miss Atwill had taken her departure.

"Is that the type of woman you want to spend your life with?" countered her still indignant husband.

"That sounds intolerant."

"Then it's a type I intend to be intolerant with," was the other's prompt response. Torrie sat silent for a time, apparently weighing what she was about to say.

"People are apt to misjudge Pannie," she finally observed. "Her bark is always a good deal worse than her bite. She keeps up that trick of clowning because her friends demand it of her. And she has more friends in this town, Owen, than you would ever imagine. And having friends, don't you think, is really one of the final tests of life?"

"At Krebbler's about three o'clock in the morning?" demanded Storrow, detecting a knife-edge buried in the rose-leaves of Torrie's quietly uttered interrogation.

"That," retorted the meditative-eyed woman in the faded arm-chair, "was probably her little revolt against the drabness of life, the kind of revolt that too much monotony and too much restraint can start in almost any woman."

Storrow, on thinking this over, decided to make no reply to it. But the import of the message, if message it was meant to be, remained deep in his mind, leaving there an area of sensitiveness, as sore to the touch as flesh in which a thorn lies embedded.

Torrie, on the other hand, had the satisfaction of finding him less intolerant than of old to the friends who formed the habit of dropping in more and more often to see her. Pannie Atwill herself proved incapable of nursing a grudge, though Torrie's secret advice as to restraint left her with a new and unlooked-for bashfulness in the presence of the slightly bewildered Storrow. Yet he was able, as he understood her better, to formulate an opinion of her and her kind which was not untouched with admiration. Under their thinness of mind and roughness of speech, he found, was often enough to be discerned odd out-croppings of integrity and blithe seriousnesses of purpose. But the idleness of stage-life, he felt, was too much for them. Their work, over-hectic at first only to become over-mechanical in the end, eventually left them with empty hands and empty days. So they were driven into foregathering, after a fashion of their own, in side-street apartment-hotels and rooming-houses, in none too orderly studios and crowded flats, to whip up their jaded hours with tobacco and talk and alcohol. For they seemed never to have learned, these gregarious wanderers, the art of being self-sufficient. They could not live without companionship.

Modrynski, when he invaded Torrie's studio before the end of the month, brought with him an altogether different atmosphere. He made his appearance as immaculate as ever but complaining of the neuritis in his legs which made the climbing of so many stairs an inheritance-tax on devotion. With Storrow, as he sat sipping Vermouth and nibbling arrowroot biscuits, he was both affable and courtly, talking art with the airy and imperious volubility of a Whistler. With Torrie he was abstractedly and paternally affectionate, leaving with her as he took his departure a crumpled handful of seats for the Metropolitan which he felt sure she and her young friends could make use of.

"It's a great thing, Torrie, this being young," he said

as with slightly palsied fingers he buttoned his fur-lined overcoat. "But that's something you and your muscular Romeo over there won't know until your fine young bodies start to wear out! Good-bye, my dear, and remember not to be too happy. There's nothing so devastating to an interesting woman as too much happiness. It kills line. And line, to the artist, is life!"

Torrie, as she closed the studio door, turned and faced her still frowning husband.

"You see what you've got to do, Honey-Bun? You've got to beat me! If you want to keep me fit to look at you've got to keep me miserable. Modrynski says so. And Modrynski is an authority."

"That man seems to look on human beings as nothing more than bone and muscle," remarked Storrow.

"That's what he pays, I suppose, for being a sculptor. That's what *you* pay for having been one. Sometimes I feel that you've forgotten I've got a soul and only want to remember that I've got a body, a body that's not uncomfortable to hold, when it's not getting in your way."

Storrow glanced about quickly, at this unlooked for note from her. It was a reproof, he felt in his heart, though still tacit reproof. And he was firmly yet secretly resolved that it should prove unmerited.

When Donnie Eastman appeared the next day, with a high-powered touring-car stripped of its hood, Storrow found that resolution of his being put to the acid test. He had no desire for joy-riding with a "Johnnie" who lisped. He was anxious to get on with his work so that Hardy could run a guiding hand over his last half dozen chapters, as the older man had promised. But Torrie was insistent. She was first petulant and then imperious. Rather than see his authority put to the test, rather than behold her riding off with the quite undisturbed Donnie Eastman and the three rainbow-hued show-girls already piled in his back seats, Storrow yielded the point and climbed into the rakish-lined car of battleship grey.

The excursion did not begin auspiciously. Torrie sat in the driver's seat beside Donnie Eastman, laughing and talking as her husband had not seen her laugh and talk for months. The loquacity of the three beaded-eyed girls about Storrow depressed him. An unceasing but indeterminate undertone of obliquity in their talk seemed to bar him back from the currents of their levity. Denied the secret of their continual laughter and chattering, he no longer made an effort to talk. He became silent and then morose. He hated the perfumes emanating from their over-dressed bodies, seeming to taint even the fresh air that blew in his face. He despised their immoderate laughter and their smartness and their lobster-palace slang. He nettled with secret shame when Torrie light-heartedly joined them in a cabaret-song of the day. The strident music of Tin-Pan Alley seemed a defilement of the purling brooks and the chrome-coloured meadows past which they hummed.

"Sing, you melancholy dog, sing!" laughed Torrie over her shoulder at him. But Storrow had no intention of singing.

When they arrived at the road-house with a glassed-in porch crowded with tables, the owner of the car greeted the head-waiter by name, waved companionably to the orchestra-leader, railed at the wine-list and sent word to the *chef* that when he ordered ruddy duck he expected it that way or he'd ruddy the demned Neopolitan's nose. This threat, lispingly uttered, was carried away by an ingratiatingly attentive waiter, a waiter with eyes as melancholy as Don Quixote's, who duly returned to authenticate the label on Donnie's vintage wine and inquire if *monsieur* would have his favourite salad.

Storrow, realizing that he remained an outlander in that noisy and convivial party, drank steadily and determinedly. He drank, hoping to find his heaviness of heart soluble in the amber liquids from those narrow-necked bottles. But the reaction, for some reason, failed

to make itself manifest. The wine seemed sour on his lips, even sourer in his heart, and the rest of the company, after an ironic effort or two to prod him into the currents of their merriment, left him entirely to his own devices. He burned with a perilous resentment when one of the hydrogenated blondes sitting next to Donnie Eastman leaned over and said something about "The melancholy Dane." That, he inwardly raged, was the fruit of his own wife's taunt from the front of the car. He waited, like a leopard on a rock-ledge, for his delicate-fingered host to echo that affront, even to acknowledge it, secretly dramatizing the expeditiousness with which he would land on that weakling and exterminate him.

But Donnie, puzzled by the look on Torrie's suddenly sobered face, was for once discreet. And on the way back to the city Torrie insisted on being old-fashioned enough to sit beside her husband. She did not join in the singing as they flashed and hummed homeward through lamp-strewn valleys past blinding headlights and silent woodlands and echoing bridge-walls. She had seen that semaphoric flash from his eyes, glowing with the banked fires that were converting his soul into a miniature Vesuvius, and she knew enough to respect it. Nor was she so indiscreet, after that night, as to refer unnecessarily to Donnie Eastman and his road-house dinner-party. Storrow's own reference to Eastman, a day or two later, was an unpremeditated one.

"If that's a sample of your millionaire class," he was heard to say, "it's no wonder your country's starting to run to socialism."

This remark was made to Chester Hardy, still the most frequent visitor at the Twenty-Fourth Street Studio and still intent on piloting Storrow through the mine-field of his first manuscript. That guiding hand, indeed, was much more active than Storrow understood at the time. Equally persistent were the older man's efforts to lead Storrow off, now and then, into a cooler and higher area

of existence. This involved an occasional lunch at an impressively torpid club, an occasional patrol of the picture-galleries, an occasional cup of tea in a house where the muffled machinery of life made his thoughts turn back to the Kirkner home.

These casual entertainments, indeed, ramified into engagements more formal, so that as the winter set in Storrow found himself contending between two forces in that city which now harboured him, the segregative instinct of the creative artist jealous of accomplishment and the fraternizing impulses of youth confronted by the ever-opening vistas of a new environment. And the closer he approached the centre of the maelstrom, he found, the greater proved the suctional power of its vortex. It was only too easy, he saw, to plunge into those manifold activities and distractions which surrounded him, which sought to make him a flying part of the flying current. Yet joined to the tug of the contrary impulse towards seclusion, the desire of quiet hours for work and meditation, was always the thought of Torrie. It was an armistice, and only an armistice, that existed between her and Hardy. And Storrow, in arguing that the city could give him much but on the other hand could rob him of even more, for a time refused to surrender completely to either force. It was a concession, he knew, but he was beginning to feel that life was made up of concessions.

This truth was all the more impressed on him when he returned to the studio one night after dining with the Rhinelanders where, Hardy had casually intimated, he would have a chance of meeting Arthur Scranton, the publisher, who was keenly interested in wood-craft and wild-life material. It was a meeting that carried the promise of future developments, though Storrow little dreamed how adroitly and painstakingly it had been engineered by the astute Hardy. He went home, accordingly, with his triumph tempered by a vague sense of

shame at what more and more assumed the colour of neglect of Torrie. Yet this vanished at a breath as he opened the studio door and found her quietly talking with Krassler.

His bow, as he drew off his gloves, was devoid of warmth, suspiciously akin to the parliamentary bow of a politician to his opponent.

Krassler, studying him with his chipmunky brown eyes through a haze of tobacco-smoke, declined to be intimidated by any such austerities.

"Torrie's just been talking about your book," he explained.

"That must have been something very remote from your interests," was Storrow's unbending retort.

"That's where you're wrong," was the quick and quite unhostile retort. "It's hit me hard. And being hit by stories is more a part of my business than you probably imagine. Only it's a hell of a long time between hits!"

It was Torrie who spoke next, with an odd little flutter of nervousness in her voice.

"He thinks, Owen, that it would have wonderful possibilities as a motion-picture."

"I'm more interested in its possibilities as a book, just now," Storrow non-committally reminded them.

Krassler's smile, for all its shrewdness, was a condoning one.

"Naturally, before you make your pie you've got to catch your rabbit. And the motion-picture is an after consideration. But we're all going more and more into that business and some time later on there might be a couple of thousand in it for you. I say there might be, remember, for both books and cakes, I understand, have the habit of occasionally coming out of the oven without rising. And producers aren't overly anxious to send companies up to the Sub-Arctics for location."

That was all that came of the matter, at the time, but it had already served to remove a paling or two from

intervening barriers of reserve. The two men sat until after midnight, smoking and talking, with Torrie in the shadowy background, a fleeting look of contentment on her abstracted face as she watched them from time to time.

"That man," acknowledged Storrow when Krassler had finally taken his departure, "is more intelligent than I had reason to suppose."

"And you treated him," rejoined Torrie, "with more consideration than I had reason to expect."

"I wouldn't have been without excuses for doing otherwise," was Storrow's retort, conscious of an unnecessary bitterness in his wife's remark. But Torrie, deeming silence the better part of discretion, quietly crossed to the windows and opened them, to let out the smoke that hung over-heavy in the room where they would have to sleep.

There were, however, still other intangible palings that were going down, still other barriers that were being eroded away by the steady currents of circumstance. Storrow, agreeing with Torrie that his place was at her side, seemed to grow less and less reluctant to join her in those "parties" which he had at first attended only under protest. He even found himself, at times, ready to defend them, ready to extenuate the heavy drinking and the casual profanity of the women, ready to aver that these lighthearted vagabonds of art were by no means as black as they painted themselves. Some of them, it is true, he could not fathom; and some of them, on the other hand, he grew to like. But none of them any longer regarded him as a kill-joy.

One night, indeed, he returned from an exceptionally convivial affair at *The Blacton* exceptionally light in the head and unsteady on his feet. Torrie, cooing with laughter, even had to help him up the stairs. But once safe in the studio, he stood in front of his wife's panel-mirror, staring intently at his own white face, with the pupils of his eyes showing black. He stared at himself

for a long time. He was quite drunk, and he knew it. He seemed to be looking, not at himself, but at another man, a man not unfit to be wept over, a pitiful and degraded man with a weak mouth and a quite colourless skin. But as he stared, shaken with pity, at that mirrored ghost of himself, his tendency to tilt unexpectedly forward on his feet brought him lurching flat-nosed against the glass, where he leaned for a moment or two, unable to recover himself. Torrie tumbled headlong into the big wing-chair, shrieking with laughter, as she caught sight of him. That brought him to his feet, stung into a resentment which at the moment he could neither define nor express. Yet he was able, by some strange duality accompanying his intoxication, to step out of his own skin, as it seemed, and impersonally inspect and appraise the thing that he was becoming, that he had already become. He said nothing to the girl still shaking with laughter in the faded green wing-chair. But a great wave of self-hate swept through his sick and shaken body. Drunkenness, after all, was not happiness, and he'd had quite enough of it. And somewhere at the calm and central core of his dizzy being he knew that such things would have to end, and end soon. He owed it to himself. He owed it to that faint and unfairly trampled spark which, if it went out, meant the obliteration not only of happiness, but of the hope of happiness.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"WHAT about your play, *The Pilot Bird?*" Storrow inquired of Hardy a few days later as they made their way up to the *Beaux Arts* Studios to inspect a couple of new pictures by Henri Veneur.

"Dead but not buried," was Hardy's cryptic retort.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that they've killed it for Broadway but left it presentable for a winter's run on the road. In the theatrical world, however, it's a case of *aut Caesar aut nihil.* And a production nowadays is a whale; if it can't get up to Broadway to breathe it can't hope to live."

"But whose fault does it seem to be?"

"I don't suppose it's the fault of any particular person," explained the older man. "It's the fault of a condition. A production's no longer a personal matter. It's something that has become institutional. But its institutionalism is messed up with a taint of vagabondage, the same vagabondage that leaves it the most foolish and the most romantic business in America today."

"Why do you call it a business?"

"Because that's all it is. Only it's a business complicated with Woman, and that's what most of the trouble arises from. The stage, you see, is still a magnet for one type of woman, the physical type, the type intent on exploiting its own beauty and charm. The mere presence of any such woman on the stage presupposes personal vanity. So it isn't primarily intelligence that you have to deal with, but a petted and petulant star and a supporting company who're thinking more about late suppers

than the way they read their lines. And when you come down to the musical comedy type, the show-girl and the chorus-girl, you get something as frankly physical, of course, as the artist's model. Her business is strictly the parade of flesh. She hasn't the slightest need for brains. And if she went into that calling with brains, she'd have to blow 'em out with a revolver, or wash 'em out with a river of high-balls — which seems to be the more approved plan of the two!"

"But there are cases," contended Storrow, "where the atmosphere isn't bad."

"The atmosphere may not always be bad," retorted the other, "but the influences are. You can't set up a clearing-house for sex — and that's what our lighter stage, stripped of its mask, really is — and expect it to be the abiding-place of Puritanism."

Storrow, conscious of the fact that Hardy might be hitting nearer home than he imagined, especially with the allusion to high-balls, was stung into a quick but futile spirit of opposition. The extent to which Torrie drank, for a woman, had been disturbing him of late. And he stood equally disturbed by the ease with which he seemed to be following in her steps. He had never, it was true, seen her entirely under the influence of liquor. She seemed able always to "trim the boat," as Pannie Atwill had once expressed it. But a few nights before, he remembered, a dreamy intonation had crept into her voice and she had merely laughed when the heaped-up tray of their dishes had crashed to the floor.

These disquieting memories were ended by his entrance to *The Beaux Arts,* where the telephone and the elevator interposed between the artist and his callers. And in that artist's studio, with its altar-cloths from Alatrio and its marbles from Rome and its wall-tapestries from the palace of a mediaeval prince, Storrow found a carefully fabricated luxuriousness strangely in contrast with the achieved humbleness of the MacDougall Alley studios

which he had visited but a week before — the little paved court flanked by converted coach-houses, as clean-swept as the street of a peasant-village, where children played quietly and quaintly, unterrified by the thought of tram or motor-car. Yet these impressions were swept aside by a still stronger one, born of a chance-heard remark that passed between Veneur and Hardy as the former for the second time passed about the heavily perfumed Egyptian cigarettes.

"I see that Vibbard is sailing for home this week."

Hardy accepted this piece of news without comment, beyond a scarcely perceptible shrug of one diffident shoulder. Storrow, on his part, was equally willing to let pass unobserved intelligence which could prove so foolishly and so indeterminately disturbing. Yet it filled and shadowed a wide area of his consciousness, touching his spirit with a vague and teasing sense of unrest.

Torrie herself, that night, oddly enough re-echoed his own vague undertone of disquiet.

"I wish, Honey, that we could slip away from this old hovel for a few weeks."

"Why?" he asked, startled by that initial expression of restlessness from her.

Her moment of hesitation did not escape him.

"Oh, I don't know," she said with a show of listlessness. "It's only that I've been thinking how you've drudged at that old book of yours and how a little holiday would do us both good — a little holiday somewhere where we could be by ourselves and just hear the sound of water or wind in the tree-tops!"

"Has something happened this week to make you feel that way?" he asked.

"Of course not," she replied, looking up quickly.

"Then it's something you've heard?" he persisted.

"Something I've heard?" she repeated. "What could I have heard?"

He had decided, earlier in the day, to say nothing

about it. But now he merely knew the necessity of unburdening his soul of the truth.

"That Vibbard's coming back here to this studio of his," he said as he stood up and faced her.

She stared up at him with no visible change of expression.

"Who told you that?" she finally asked.

"Veneur," was his reply. He watched her as she stooped and picked up a fallen hair-pin from the floor.

"And what has Vibbard's coming back to his studio got to do with us?" she demanded.

"That's what I wanted to find out," was his retort.

She leaned back in her chair, apparently deep in thought.

"Owen," she finally said with an achieved quietness which did not altogether take the vibrant tones from her voice, "I have given myself to you. I'm giving my life up to you. I feel, in a way, that I've put myself in your hands, and that you can mould me and shape me about the same as you used to shape a lump of moist clay into what you most want it to be. I fell in love with you, and let you do what you wanted with me. I love you now. I know that as well as I know I'm sitting in this chair — and I think you know it too. You mean more to me than anything in my old life ever meant, ever could mean. But I can't help feeling that the power this gives you over me, the power to make me happy or miserable, carries with it an obligation to be fair to what I'm trying to be, and do. I hate to think of you questioning me, and being suspicious of me, and probing about in the past for things that aren't worth digging up and that have nothing to do with our lives now when they *are* dug up. I once said that we could be as happy as two children, if we only had the common-sense to keep the trick of happiness within reach. You remember that, don't you?"

"I remember it," he acknowledged, both relieved and depressed by these words which she was uttering with a

new and unlooked for gift of articulation. He was, too, acutely conscious of her beauty, touched now with a new overtone of wistfulness that struck him as almost autumnal in its tenderness.

"Life, after all," she went on almost wearily, "is a race between happiness and the undertaker — and the undertaker is always so apt to win. And "—

"That sounds like Modrynski," cut in her husband, sharply.

"I guess that was thought of long before Modrynski was born," replied Torrie, forlornly tranquillized by her fleeting little contemplation of time's infinitudes. Her face, relaxing into pensiveness, disturbed Storrow by its remoteness. It made him think of Rodin's *Le Penseur.* Yet he stood shadowed by the same cloud that darkened, however momentarily, her own soul, a cloud born of the consciousness that life was short and death came to everything and love after all seemed only a passionate embrace on the brink of a grave, and the foolish cry of his darkened heart for something permanent in the midst of the things that must surely pass. He stared at the shadowy-eyed woman in the faded green arm-chair, seeming to find her made suddenly precious through very impermanence. She appeared more than ever remote from him, and yet very near. She seemed finished and free, courageous, capable always of choosing her own paths and her own ends. Yet the next moment she carried to him the impression of a harried and beaten ship being driven before the wind, buffeted by currents over which she had no control, the toy of tides, infinitely older and stronger than her own body. An indefinable pity for her crept up into his heart, a wide pity in which his temporal perplexities betrayed a tendency to become attenuated, as thin and futile as a row of gas-lamps found burning after daybreak.

They talked no more of the matter in hand, that night,

though he was not without an occasional suspicion that it was still occupying much of Torrie's thought.

Nor did he find his own soul swept quite clean of its problems by this tenuous broom of emotionalism. Towards the end of the week, when he knew that Torrie was away for the afternoon, he expended three dollars for the purchase and delivery of an empty piano-case. Then, with saw and hammer, he deliberately and cool-headedly set about nailing up the communicating door between the two studios. He removed the *debris,* impressed with a sense of finality, replacing the imitation Gobelin tapestry with the preoccupied gravity that attaches to a ceremony fittingly executed.

It was several days before Torrie herself discovered that unexpected and significant bit of carpentry. Storrow, bent over his work-table, caught the sound of her sudden gasp and looked up in time to see the sharp recoil of her body as she let the tapestry fall back in place.

"Did it surprise you?" he quietly demanded.

"No," she said, after a moment's silence, without turning about. "But it makes me think of a coffin. It looks exactly — exactly like a casket-box on end!"

"Then *de mortuis nil nisi bonum,*" remarked the man at the table, remembering the ancient phrase from one of his earliest school-boy orations. And of that dead past, indeed, nothing good or bad was said, though Torrie remained inordinately quiet during the next few days and spent a greater amount of her time away from the studio. If Storrow, preoccupied with the closing chapters of his book, was conscious of these absences, he offered no comment on them.

On a day of driving snow, with the wind rattling the casements and the street-noises of the city strangely muffled, Storrow bundled up his manuscript and announced that it was in fit and final shape for Hardy's judicial eye. He decided, with the impatience of the

artist still warm with the fires of creation, to hear at once the best or the worst that his older friend might have to say.

"You don't mind, do you?" he asked of Torrie as he noticed the hesitating light in her eye. He was disturbingly conscious of recent neglect, but he was equally conscious, on the other hand, that a new and less worried régime awaited them.

"Of course I don't mind," she told him. "But you must bundle up, for this storm. And be sure and wear your rubbers."

He laughed a little at that. To him, the son of the North, any such gentle little flurry of goose-feathers seemed scarcely worthy of being called a storm. He was even anxious to feel the wind, cutting from river to river through the narrow cross-streets, bite at his face and sweep the cobwebs from his brain. Yet it pleased him to think, as he dutifully pulled on the rubbers, which he despised, that she could worry thus foolishly about his welfare, that she could nurse an excuse for any such chance of "mothering" him.

"And if I'm not back for luncheon," he explained, "don't worry. Hardy may keep me there for three or four hours."

She followed him to the door, signifying her understanding by a silent nod of the head. He was intent, at the moment, on speculating as to what Hardy's verdict would be. It meant a great deal to him. It meant a great deal to them both.

"Good luck, Honey," she said, with a wintry little smile strangely in contrast to the throaty intensity of her voice.

He stopped, arrested by that unlooked for note. Then he turned back to her in the gloomy hallway.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Nothing," she told him.

"What is it?" he repeated, coming still closer.

"You forgot something," she reminded him. "Something I need."

He laughed, almost sorrowfully, as he took her in his arms and held her close against his rough tweed ulster. He kissed her, depressed by a sense of incompetence, of heavy clumsiness, a prey to the shyness which sways the naturally reticent man, and a moment later made a hurried escape down the stairs, intent on hiding some wayward ebullition of emotion from her eyes. As he went he overheard the strains of a piano, muffled and far-away, from some remoter door along the gloomy hallway. He recognized the air from *Mignon,* the air he had always loved.

"Knowest thou the land where the citron grows?" he murmured as he faced the driving snow, weaving that movement so accidentally overheard into a vague and new-born mood of aspiration, and accepting it, without stopping to reason why, as a good omen.

Yet he was wrong in this, he found when he had reached Fifth Avenue, for Hardy was not at home. So he scribbled a note of explanation, left it beside the manuscript, and once more faced the driving snow that seemed to put a soft pedal on the multitudinous noises of the city. He wandered idly on, released from all thought of time and destination, isolated by the whirling screen that made even a skyscraper a thing of romance, exhilarated by the whip of the wind, exulting in the air of novelty which a mantling whiteness was imposing upon every-day street-corners and once familiar buildings. But his delight in that snow-storm, it suddenly occurred to him, was selfish. He would get Torrie and they would revel in it together. So he swung about and let the wind drive him homeward, with a lightness of heart which was too airy even to stop and question its source.

He was at the studio door, with his hand thrust out to

grasp the knob, when the sound of voices came to him. His approach, he remembered, had been silenced by the rubbers which he wore.

"But *are* you happy?" he heard a man's voice demanding. It was a voice new to Storrow. It was a voice with some slightest tinge of foreign intonation, a smooth and mellow voice with a note of calm authority which seemed to approach the insouciant. And Storrow promptly disliked that voice as a voice, translating his antipathy into a tenuous justification for remaining there motionless, with his hand arrested on the knob of the door which he declined to throw open.

"Of course I'm happy, or I wouldn't be here," was Torrie's reply. It was uttered coolly, yet with a touch of irritability in its frigidness. There was the sound of a laugh, low and confident, a man's laugh which proved unreasonably disturbing to the second man beyond the door.

"You say that," argued the voice with the slightly Gallicized intonation, "but something in your eyes tells me that it's not quite the truth."

The eavesdropper, from that moment, nursed no further qualms of conscience. He merely waited, foolishly tense, for what might come next.

"Then you'd better depend more on what I say than what I happen to appear," was Torrie's almost listless retort.

Her companion, it was apparent, stood determined to ignore any note of hostility from her.

"But when you happen to appear so unlike the old Torrie I used to know, I am *distrait,*" murmured the other, in a voice so low that Storrow had difficulty in overhearing it.

"Then why worry about it?" was Torrie's curt demand. And Storrow knew, by this time, that it was Vibbard talking to his wife. He knew it, without quite knowing why he knew. And he was almost glad of it,

in a way, for at the mere vibrations of that human voice a thousand suspended antipathies and animosities were definitely precipitated, and made visible in the stagnant pools of suspicion, giving a focal point towards which attention might thereafter be bent, a nucleus of offence at last ponderable to groping intelligence.

"I can't help worrying about it, my dear."

"And what gave you that right?" Torrie demanded.

"The dead past that is never quite as dead, my dear, as we imagine," was the other's softly enunciated response.

"Then you'd better wait and discuss that right with my husband," challenged Torrie, obviously angered by the other's careless fortitude.

"Husband!" cried Vibbard. "That word, Torrie, seems ridiculous on your lips. It sounds unreal. I can't imagine you married."

"But I am," was the low-toned response.

"Then I can't imagine your staying married, any more than I can imagine a stormy petrel in a sixpenny willow cage. You're not made for that sort of life. Your spirit, my dear, is too free and big for that sort of thing. It's what they do to market-ducks when they crowd them into a shipping-crate. They tie them together, stupidly. It's what they do to jail-birds when they want to make sure of their captivity — hand-cuff them together, like the market-ducks. But for a woman who has known liberty, who has known the wing-sweep of untrammelled adoration, who has learned the taste of freedom, it won't do, it simply won't do!"

It was Torrie who laughed this time, though there was more defiance than mirth in the sound of that laughter.

"Then what do you intend doing about it?" she mocked. Her demand was followed by a silence of several seconds.

"I intend to take you in my arms, you beautiful white flower, and crush the essence of rapture from your lips,"

intoned the self-intoxicated æsthete confronting her.

"Against my will?" asked Torrie. The question seemed so calmly uttered that it took on a touch of the meditative.

"Those are the things that women forget," murmured the other.

"And that's the way a nigger treats a woman — and occasionally gets lynched for it," the incisive-voiced girl reminded him.

"Lynching is easy compared to the torture I feel when I see you standing there!" The voice lowered, and the last of the mockery went out of it.

"Oh, I want you, Torrie, no matter what it costs!"

The silence was broken by a sound of movement within the room.

"Wait!" It was Torrie's voice, a little shrill with apprehension.

"I can't wait," cried the other, with a quaver in his voice.

It was at that moment that Storrow swung open the studio door.

Torrie, standing under the wide-diffused light from the snow-sprinkled skylight above her, did not move. The only movement that took place in the room, once Storrow had swung shut the door behind him, was from Vibbard. He wheeled about, with a transformation that was as adroit as it was sudden, and faced the cast of *The Sentinel Wolf* that stood on its pedestal against the wall.

"Yes, as I say, there is undoubtedly power in the basic idea. And there is power, too, in the modelling," he intoned with a quick assumption of critical detachment. It was both foolish and futile, advertising a dexterity in subterfuge which tended to fan Storrow's rage to a still whiter heat. For in it the newcomer only too easily detected an odious sophistication in intrigue, an adroitness at protective attitudinizing, which bespoke the gal-

lant of many affairs. And Vibbard, desperately conscious of the farce, stopped speaking and turned slowly about and stared at the intruder with his back to the door.

Silently and deliberately Storrow took off his hat and gloves, and then his overcoat, tossing them on the floor beside him. He wanted nothing to interfere with his freedom of movement. He was white, almost sick-looking in the uncertain light, all the forces of life suddenly concentrated at the core of his being, marshalled and crowded there for that impending supreme effort which the outposts of instinct announced as perilously near.

The silence was not broken even as Storrow stepped towards the other man, eyeing him with steel-blue meditativeness, as preoccupied as a surgeon, apparently, before an operation. Vibbard, he observed, was a much larger man than he had been led to expect from the timbre and intonations of his voice. Storrow found himself almost able to exult in this, for it meant that what was about to come would not come with too unnerving a facility. He also nursed a vague fear that the other man might in some way seek safety in flight. But pride was too strong, he was glad to see, in that grey-faced and slightly gaping-mouthed opponent who sensed to the full what was coming and preferred to face it without falling back. So strong was personal pride with Vibbard, in fact, that he essayed a futile and forlorn movement to save his face, even at the last.

"I suppose," he said in an exceptionally thin voice, "this is some new brand of American blackmail!"

It was a doubly unfortunate remark. And it proved to be the last one from Vibbard. It was a lash on the rawest flank of Storrow's overtried nerves, yet a lash which turned him aside from his intention of knocking the other man down, as he had decided to do.

He declined to bestow on his enemy even that qualified dignity. Instead, he caught Vibbard by the *Avenue de*

*la Paix* cravat in which nested his *Place Vendome* cameo and slapped the face, contorted with sudden loud protests, from side to side, as a kitten slaps a spool. It was a slap with the open hand, painful in impact, but doubly humiliating in its note of toying condescension, of easy contempt. When Vibbard attempted to clinch and save himself from this punishment Storrow fell to mauling the dandified body as he had once seen a grizzly maul a hunting-hound. And then Vibbard, driven to the natural extremity of the hopeless, fell to clawing and biting at his assailant. But that opposition was no longer necessary to the man who still wore a pair of slush-stained rubbers on his feet. He had smouldered for months with the Vesuvian fires that were now letting themselves go. He was releasing in action the poisons which week by week he had kept within him, eating like acid. Soured inhibitions, stifled impulses, swarmed to the surface. The prolonged physical inactivity of a body active by instinct and training seemed to obliterate itself in one passionate and unreasoning outburst. He hated this soft-handed philanderer, this hunter of women. He even remembered what Hardy had once said to him, to the effect that every so-called lady's man stood mysteriously yet eternally kickable, stood always despicable, in the eyes of other men.

And then the reaction came.

It came about the time that Torrie, standing narrow-eyed and breathless, finally gasped out: "Owen, you'll kill him!" But Owen, it was plain, was swayed by no such fears. He remembered that it was not the first fist-fight into which he had been ushered because of the woman behind him. And it suddenly struck him as an absurd and unreasoning and bestial sort of business. It was not the way, he knew, in which any problem worthy the name had ever been settled or ever could be settled. It merely deferred final issues and intoxicated with its false impression of triumph. It degraded life by giving

factitious value to the brutish thump of fist against opposing flesh. And he had known enough of it.

Storrow, with a sudden withering of hate which left him listless and heavy-hearted, picked his sodden opponent up bodily and dragged him to the door. Through that door, with a feeling of nausea as acutely physical as the *mal de mer* born of a rolling ship-deck, he flung the man with the blood-stained face. Then, dreading that Torrie's keen eye should behold the misery and meekness on his own face, he fabricated a sustaining appearance of ferocity and strode to the kitchenette tap, where he let the cold water run over his bruised knuckles.

"And I guess that settles Alan Vibbard for us," he proclaimed as he secretly steadied himself against the sink-edge.

"But," began Torrie, almost in a whisper. She did not continue. Storrow, however, seemed able to read her thoughts.

"If he comes back, I'll do the same thing over again," he announced, staring at the white-faced woman to see if any shadow of pity lurked in her eyes. But they were barricaded eyes, enigmatic, inscrutable, no longer touched with triumph.

And Alan Vibbard betrayed no intention of coming back. Two days later a moving-van backed up to the curb and three men, of whom the owner was not one, stripped the adjoining studio of its hangings and furniture and *objets d'art*. In the hallway Storrow happened to pass one of these men carrying in his arms a Russian samovar.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"A DECENT book isn't written, as a rule; it's re-written," Chester Hardy had announced in extenuation of the somewhat sweeping changes which he had suggested to Storrow after going through the younger author's manuscript. And the truth of this came home to Storrow as he did what he could to carry out these suggestions. Even his final conviction that the older man was right did not serve to render his labour any less difficult and any less lugubrious. Once persuaded that the issue was closed, that the work was complete, its reopening took on the nature of a *post-mortem,* proving almost as gloomy a bit of business as the re-opening of a coffin. He was tired of the thing. The last of his enthusiasm seemed burned out, and the puppets of his creation, to his jaundiced eye, took on the soiled and faded aspect of counter-goods too frequently handled.

But he worked on doggedly, even if under difficulties. It began to tell a little, both on nerves and temper, for he found that he slept now only after a more and more substantial "night-cap." He also found Torrie's inconsequential comings and goings, her haphazard callers, her lighthearted lack of order, a provocation to quick and unreasoning irritability. And this in turn reacted on Torrie, who complained of his preoccupation, of the lack of comforts in the studio, of the housekeeping hardships involved in such quarters. She became more and more silent, more and more self-contained.

"If we're going to live in this dump," she announced one morning after journeying for the second time down

to the studio of a wall-paper artist on the second floor to answer telephone calls, "I've at least got to have a 'phone."

"Can we afford it?" queried Storrow, looking up from his type-writer, for only the night before they had taken up the matter of expenditure and her husband had awakened to the disturbing fact that he had been living beyond his income. He had remembered the even more disturbing fact that she had once protested that he would find her an expensive luxury.

"If we can't stand that," retorted Torrie, "we may as well give up."

"Give up what?" asked Storrow, trying to keep the note of alarm out of his voice.

Torrie shrugged a shoulder as she walked to the window.

"Give up pretending to be civilized," she replied with an obvious effort at moderation. But her cool look of disdain, as he sat staring at her with abstracted eyes, did not escape him.

"Yes, I think we'd better have a telephone put in," he acknowledged quietly, as he turned back to his work.

"Surely your book will bring you in something," ventured Torrie, touched by afterthought into a fleeting moment of remorse.

"It ought at least to pay for a 'phone," acknowledged Storrow, with his attention already directed towards the page in front of him.

"Will you be through with it by a week from tomorrow?" he heard her asking.

"Yes — with luck," he answered. "Why?"

Torrie slowly struck a match and lighted a cigarette.

"Because that happens to be my birthday, O lord and master, and Mattie Crowder's just warned me the bunch are going to spring a surprise party on us. Will you mind?"

He felt that there was a veiled note of mockery in her

meekness. But it was so veiled that it left him touched with doubt.

"Of course I won't mind," he protested, "so long as I can be one of the party. And when this thing is cleared away, Torrie, we'll have more chance of getting a little fun out of life. And, speaking of that, let's go over to the Della Robbia Room at the Vanderbilt for dinner to-night."

But Torrie shook her head.

"I couldn't enjoy it."

"Why not?" he demanded.

"The answer is just one word, Owen, *clothes!*"

This seemed to puzzle him.

"Why, the last time we were there you enjoyed it. And you looked pretty good to me."

Torrie sat on the wide window-sill, viewing him with meditative eyes.

"I may have pretended to enjoy it, but I didn't. I don't think you realize, Owen, what clothes mean to a woman."

"In the matter of keeping her warm?" suggested Storrow, with an ironical matter-of-factness which Torrie decided to ignore.

"That may be all right for the woman you're writing about there," she said with a head-nod towards his manuscript. "But the city woman doesn't wear clothes to keep warm. She wears clothes to make herself attractive and show that she's in the style. And that word *style,* my dear, is the biggest word in the American language. It stands for the biggest force in all our world. The things that you men think are so big, the things you call hunger and religion and honour and love, aren't even able to stand up beside it, in the long run. The right sort of clothes can give us women a glory we can't even get out of love. Knowing we're properly dressed can give us a peace of soul we can't possibly get out of religion."

Storrow sat confronting this coldly enunciated truth,

wondering if men, after all, were destined forever to misjudge women, were prompted eternally to attribute to them over-visionary ideals.

"But the thing is so absurdly relative," he contended. "Take the Chippewa squaw as I've seen her, for instance. A red blanket and a string of glass beads can satisfy her soul just as fully as a Paquin model might do for you."

"And she'd satisfy the reservation buck in that get-up, but she'd never satisfy the New Yorker," countered Torrie. "It's really a matter of keeping up with your own circle. And it's a sort of warfare, where we have to fight to the last breath, whether we want to or not. Look at those shops along Fifth Avenue, the shops for which our New York men slave and work their lives out! Look at the working-girls who spend their wages in the Sixth Avenue imitations of those shops. And look at the stage-girls who drift up and down the Rialto rooting for work, togged out in their flashy imitations of the Sixth Avenue imitations. They're all battling, every one of them, battling to keep their heads above water in our awful American ocean of style."

Storrow had no difficulty in recalling the types. His difficulty lay more in accepting the argument.

"But those Rialto ladies, as I remember 'em," he reminded his wife, "usually wear a diamond or two about the size of a salt-cellar."

"Yes, and not more than one in ten of them the real thing! That's the pathetic part of it, the never-ending need for pretence. And it's just as pathetic when they are real, once you understand what they've gone without and given up to keep that solitary stone. For stage-people, you see, have a childish belief that diamonds are always a good investment, even though the interest on what they borrow on them amounts to three per cent a month, when it comes to the question of the pawn-shop."

Storrow, before this parade of worldly wisdom, could

afford to laugh. It was, however, a slightly acidified laugh.

"But you'd be without even that life-line, wouldn't you?" he told her.

"How do you mean?"

"It's just occurred to me that I've never given you a jewel in your life," he explained.

"You don't need to," Torrie replied.

"And why not?"

"I guess I've got about all I care for," was her reply.

"I've never seen you wear them," he retorted.

"I've been ashamed to," was her counter-retort.

"Why?" he demanded, with a slight stirring of unrest.

"I'd look too much like your Rialto lady with the salt-cellar," was the almost listless response.

"Are they so magnificent?"

Torrie, with a slightly curled lip, glanced slowly about the crowded studio.

"No; but they'd seem incongruous," was her none too tranquillizing reply. Storrow wheeled about in his chair, with a darker impulse creeping across the horizon of consciousness.

"Would you mind letting me see them?" he said with an assumption of nonchalance.

"What's the use?" was Torrie's lazily intoned interrogation. But after he had repeated that request she slowly crossed the room to where her steel-bound theatrical trunk stood against the wall. She lifted the lid of this, and from a canvas-covered compartment made to receive it, took out a japanned tin make-up box. Then from behind the leather backing of a small square hand-mirror she extracted a key. An odour, a slightly stale and heavy odour of cosmetics, floated up from the trunk as the stooping woman lifted out first one and then another of the wide canvas-covered trays. From the very bottom of that chamber of faded perfumes and memories

she took out a second tin make-up box wrapped in a towel blotched with sanguinary-looking stains of lip-rouge. She carried this box to a chair and sat with it on her knees as she unlocked it. Storrow caught sight of a faded package of papers, a photograph or two, and what looked like a bundle of letters tied together with a cherry-coloured ribbon. From under these Torrie lifted out a small chamois bag, very soiled. She closed the make-up box, thrust it behind her, and having untied the bag, emptied it on her lap.

Storrow knew little about precious stones, cared little, with his defective colour-sense, for their beauty, had thought little about their value. But it struck him, as he stared down at that array of rings and clasps and trinkets, as an unexpectedly impressive collection of ornaments. What even more forcibly struck him, however, was the seeming carelessness with which they had been tossed together, with a dusting of face-powder on the unburnished metal, with dirt between the little platinum claws that bit at the edges of the brilliants, with a loose garnet that had obviously broken away from its setting. And this relieving air of contempt was accentuated by Torrie's indifferent gesture as she scrambled them about in the little valley of drapery between her knees. Storrow picked up a marquise ring, made up of a white diamond surrounded by rubies.

"Wouldn't you call that rather valuable?" he inquired as he dusted its face. Torrie, with an indifferent eye, glanced up at it for a moment.

"I'd call it rather cheap and showy," she retorted as she made an effort to shove the loose garnet back into its bruised setting.

"Where did it come from?" asked Storrow, trying to make the question a casual one.

Torrie laughed at the solemnity on his face.

"That, Honey Bun, came from one of your unsuccessful rivals," she proclaimed as she began tossing the

jewellery back into its chamois container. But his brow remained clouded, for in his world, he remembered, women neither accepted nor kept jewels in this light and airy fashion. He was about to tell her so when he was interrupted by a caller at his door, a solemn-eyed and threadbare girl who dispiritedly inquired if he used models.

When Storrow turned back into the studio Torrie had replaced the trunk-trays and slammed down and snapped shut the top-catches, with a valedictory slapping together of the finger-tips, to brush from them the dust with which Time powders the unused. And it struck Storrow, as he went back to his work, that little could now be gained by reopening the issue.

He plunged into that work with a new impatience in his blood, oppressed by a vague ache of past incompetencies, determined to stand no longer between Torrie and her rehabilitation. This attitude of self-accusation had a tendency to leave him more than ever submissive before Torrie's disturbingly ramifying preparations for that surprise-party which betrayed scant promise of possessing the slightest element of the unexpected.

Two days before that event, by working night and day, he succeeded in completing the manuscript which to his own eyes had become as stale and colourless as a circus-bill on a December barn-end. The casual and unemotional manner in which it was carried off by Chester Hardy, the next day, tended to accentuate this impression of its worthlessness. Storrow, alone in the studio, weighed down in spirit, depressed by the insidious and distorting toxins of mental fatigue, stared at the new cut-glass decanters with which Torrie had decorated his battered buhl table. He remembered, as he studied the rich amber frustum made by the light striking across the contents of one of these decanters, that there, close at hand, lay a key of release from the desolating stagnation that possessed him. He reached for a glass, filled it half

full, and hissed into it a spurt or two from one of the seltzer-siphons.

Having drunk this off, he sat down, morosely awaiting the desired effect. Then, finding not the slightest sign of exhilaration manifesting itself, he repeated the operation. This resulted in a vague feeling of uplift, touched with recklessness. Deciding to convert that feeling into something more definite, he took still another drink. After that he no longer cared about either his moods or his movements.

When Torrie returned to the studio that night she stopped short with her parcels, startled by the figure that he presented.

"Owen!" she called out sharply.

His answer was as care-free as it was inarticulate. Slowly the look of anxiety ebbed out of her eyes. She could even afford to laugh a little as she threw aside her hat and gloves.

"But *where* did you get it?" she demanded with a humorous inspection of him at closer range.

"God id all by m'she'f!" proudly but heavily announced the swaying figure before her. She backed her husband into a chair, and stood looking down at him.

"Aren't you just a day or two too early?" she asked.

"Th' early bird casshes th' worm," he explained with a prodigious conviction of wisdom. The enormity of that wisdom so impressed him, in fact, that he solemnly reiterated the aphorism. If, through those fogs of inebriacy, he looked for some reproof from her, he was muddily perplexed by the absence of all rancour on her part.

"I don't think you can ever afford to preach to me, after this," she said to him as she buttoned up the jacket of his pyjamas. "I was never in *that* condition in my life."

He slept heavily and late the next morning. Torrie, in fact, was up and dressed and had the studio put to

rights before he so much as stirred. Nor did he stir, an hour later, when a knock sounded on the door.

Torrie, answering that knock, confronted Chester Hardy asking for her husband.

"He's in," she acknowledged after a moment of hesitation, "but I'm afraid you can't see him."

"He's not ill, is he?" inquired the caller, remembering the past weeks of overwork which seemed to have taken not a little of the spring out of Storrow's step.

"No, he's not ill," was Torrie's deliberate reply. "But he got very drunk last night and he hasn't slept it off yet."

She met Hardy's stare with an enigmatic stare that seemed almost one of triumph. It was the man who eventually lowered his eyes.

"Well, when he's in a condition to understand the message, will you explain to him that I had Arthur Scranton personally read his manuscript at once. Scranton's house has accepted it for publication. He 'phoned me about it this morning and gave me a record decision. And I rather felt that you'd both want to hear the good news."

Torrie looked up at him, humbled in spite of herself.

"That *is* good news," she murmured.

"And it comes, as I remember it, on your birthday," added the man with the uncomfortably penetrating eyes.

"It's the finest birthday gift that you could have brought to me," she said without looking up.

"It will bring a thousand dollars, in advance royalties," Hardy coldly announced.

"I wasn't thinking of that part of it," was Torrie's quick retort.

"But it's a part," observed Hardy, noting the faint flush that crept up to her forehead, "that can't afford to be overlooked. I had another message for your husband, but it can wait."

Torrie, when he had gone, sat in the faded green arm-

chair deep in thought. Then, emerging from her abstraction, she made coffee and prepared breakfast with exceptional care. There was a tray, studiously laid, awaiting Storrow when he awakened. He sat up and inspected it with a lack-lustre eye.

"Feel better, Honey?" Torrie casually inquired.

"Yes," he said, sour with self-hate.

"Can you eat something?" was her next query. The man on the bed shook his head from side to side. He lifted his hands and pressed them against his temples. But that definite and decipherable pain, he felt, was more endurable than the dull ache of shame that weighed on his heart. He remembered the Dionysian revels at Brownie Tell's *bal masque,* the revels he had railed at. He remembered the historic night at *The Blacton.* He thought of Pannie Atwell and her bubble-water friends at Krebbler's at three o'clock in the morning. He had fallen as low as any of them. He was one of them now, stamped with the same brand, squeezed into the same mould.

"Would you like to hear some good news?" demanded Torrie, disturbed by the misery on his face. He turned and regarded her with bloodshot eyes, with an expression dangerously akin to distaste on his face. There was no news just then, he felt, that could be good news. He stared at his cooling breakfast, heavily conscious of the solicitude that had prompted its preparation. Mingled with his shame was a newer note of contrition, contrition for service unrecognized.

"What news?" he asked, with an effort.

"The Scrantons are going to publish your novel," she told him, waiting in vain for some visible reaction to that announcement.

"Who told you that?" he finally asked.

"Hardy came here this morning, especially to let you know."

A new light came into the dulled eyes regarding her.

"And you explained why he couldn't see me?" demanded Storrow.

Torrie hesitated.

"I told him the truth," she finally admitted. Yet she was hardly prepared for the utter misery that over-spread his face.

"Then he understands now that I'm one of you," ejaculated the unhappy man on the disordered bed. Torrie flinched a little at the reproach in that exclamation.

"Why should you be so biggety-feeling, just because you've sold a book?" she coolly inquired. "And if being in the state you are means being one of us, I scarcely need to remind you that you began it pretty early in the game. You were that way about the first night I ever saw you, if I remember correctly."

"Yes, I began it pretty early in the game," echoed the unhappy Storrow, supine in his utter self-abasement. And he lay there murmuring "O God, O God!" in a manner so disagreeably impressive to his wife that she left his side and busied herself with purely gratuitous tasks about the room.

He got out of bed and took a cold bath, a rite which under ordinary circumstances seldom failed to lure back his vanished sense of well-being. But in this case it only accentuated the sharp and throbbing pressure about his temples. So he mixed himself a "John Collins," after the manner of the circle of which he had become so unwittingly a member, and finding a modified relief from the lash of this chilled but warming liquid, in half an hour repeated the treatment. Throughout the day, in fact, he seemed set on keeping Intelligence from emerging from its fumey lair. He seemed intent on ushering Afterthought from the threshold of consciousness. Since it hurt him to think, he decided to do away with thinking. So he dulled his mind with alcohol, remaining in a mild anaesthesia which mounted almost to exhilaration as evening approached.

"What's got into you, anyway?" demanded his wife, with her first touch of apprehension at a mood which she could not comprehend.

"The spirit of the city," he retorted with a curt laugh.

"Wouldn't *spirits* be nearer the mark?" asked Torrie as she glanced at a half-empty decanter.

"Well, for once I'm going to be one of you," he explained with reckless levity, though beneath that levity Torrie could detect a disturbing touch of mockery.

Yet he most indisputably made himself one of the circle on that night of nights. He seemed intent on demonstrating to the light-hearted throng that came straggling up to the studio that he was no longer a kill-joy in their midst, that he could be a good fellow with the best of them. He greeted stage-girls still in their make-up with noisy and offhanded *camaraderie*. He shook hands fraternally with unknown men in evening dress, men whose shirt-fronts stood out of the shadows like tombstones. He entered gaily into the long and vociferous arguments as to the proper mixing of drinks, as to the relative merits of rye and Scotch, as to the correct kind of Vermouth for certain cocktails, and as to the proper recipes for whiskey slings and cobblers and milk punches and mint juleps. When no fresh strawberries were in evidence for the latter, a pale youth in a fur-lined overcoat called loudly for his *chauffeur* and proclaimed that he would find strawberries for that party, even if he had to jimmy his way into Charles' and Hicks' or ransack the last ice-box in the Biltmore and the Plaza. After he had left on this beneficent crusade, amid cheers, Storrow found himself tutoring a stout lady, in extreme *décolleté*, through the intricate steps of an Indian ghost-dance. He also found himself, a little later, rhapsodically responding to Modrynski's toast to Torrie, to Torrie Throssel, "and well-named, my friends, for as I remember it the Scotch throssil is a contrivance for the twisting up of threads,

and here is a Throssel who twists up our heart-strings the moment we bask in the light of her eyes!"

Storrow replied to that toast, without being fully conscious of what he was saying. Even the cheers and the hand-clappings came to him thinly, as though travelling over great wastes of distance. But that impression was in turn obliterated by the intrusion of a tom-tom and a Scotch bag-pipe commandeered from a neighbouring studio, to the music of which a number of barbaric dances were improvised. Then Brownie King's efforts to do a life-size portrait on the wall, with a burnt champagne-cork, prompted Storrow to attempt a portrait-bust of Mattie Crowder, the medium for the same being a pound of butter from the kitchenette ice-box. But this medium, refusing to hold its line in the warm room, was taken up bodily and impressed against Mattie's screaming face, in an even more futile effort to achieve a life-mask.

It lasted until well towards morning, that swirling and shouting revel, and always Storrow seemed to be in the thick of it. But always, at the same time, deep within the core of consciousness a lonely sentinel seemed to pace a lonely rampart, a sentinel with a voice which kept muttering: "This is folly. This is madness and emptiness. And things such as this may be, but they must never be again. Never — never again!"

It was not until the crowd had thinned a little that Storrow found himself sitting on the overturned buhl table, staring solemnly but unsteadily into the half-satyric face of Pannie Atwill.

"Pannie, I'm as drunk as a lord," he finally and slowly averred.

"You don't need to advertise *that!*" announced Pannie with her quiet laugh.

"But it's the last time," contended Storrow, putting his shoulders back, "the last time."

"Tell that to Sweeney," remarked the unimpressed girl in front of him. Then she turned and swept him

with her coolly appraising eye. "And I'm not so sure but what it'll do you good. Perhaps it'll wash a little of the starch out of your make-up, you frozen-necked Canuck!"

Storrow sat worrying over that light-hearted remark, worrying over it even more than over his condition. Would he come to see things in that light? Would the ability to decide what was right or wrong slip away from him? Would he, too, lose his power of judging, of being able to recognize what was evil and cramping and what was strengthening and liberating? In that case he could see, muddled as he was, that he should indeed have become one of them. Then it struck him as odd that he should worry at all. Wine, he had always heard, left men light-hearted and care-free. Yet in his case he was being duped. It was not leaving him joyous at heart. It was merely giving him a mask of merriment, a mask behind which misery could still lurk. When he asked himself the reason for this, he was unable to answer. But capriciously and suddenly there came to him the memory of pine-clad hills sharp against ruddy sunsets, of rustling valleys of bracken filled with the scent of the balsam, of water lapping against pebbly shores and overarching skies of serene and brooding azure.

He looked up, dizzily, staring abstractedly before him as though the gold-green vistas of a robin-haunted twilight were to be visioned there. Instead, he saw a disordered room still blue-grey with tobacco-smoke, a litter of glasses and unclean dishes, a welter of sullen shadow and light, and two vaguely defined figures which lost their remoteness as he stared at them. One of these figures, he saw, was Torrie. He could see the pearly lustre of the milk-white skin along one shoulder, cut by the black-velvet shoulder-strap of her gown. The other figure was Modrynski's, so tall and statue-like in his long-caped great-coat that he stood by the open door strangely like a gaunt and hooded figure of Death. Storrow, viewing

them with a singularly detached mind, saw Modrynski slowly turn about and stoop down, with the black cape falling about his shoulders in almost a monk-like effect. He saw the lined and yellow face bend still lower and thrust itself into the soft hollow of Torrie's neck.

It was as startling as though he had beheld her kissed on the bare flesh by the lips of Death. He expected almost to hear the rattle of bones as he perceived that antique, stooping frame shake with its senile palsy accentuated by some momentary emotion. But it was too odious even to contemplate.

For the second time Storrow let his head sink into his hands, submerged with an immense new misery of betrayal. He was being duped that night, he felt, for the second time, irreparably, unfathomably duped. Yet it amazed him to find that he was incapable of action, that he could contemplate a situation undermining the solidest timbers of his happiness and make no effort to combat it. He sat without moving, no longer conscious of even the throbbing ache in his temples, absorbing to the full a shock which could leave him more stupified than alcohol.

It was not until Torrie closed the studio-door and crossed the room that he made an effort to get to his feet.

"I saw it," he said as he confronted her.

"Saw what?" she sharply demanded, appraising his none too steady posture with an eye in which burned both antagonism and disdain. It was an unnaturally bright eye, made almost luminous by the extraordinary whiteness of her face. And even in that inapposite moment Storrow was stung sharply by the sense of her beauty.

"You and Modrynski," he replied, averse even to putting into words a thing still too odious for expression.

"What about me and Modrynski?" she challenged.

"You know as well as I do," he counter-challenged, awakening to the fact that she herself was none too steady on her feet.

"Know what?" she insisted, apparently intent on making him phrase what he was so reluctant to drag out into the open. He turned away from her and stared at the cast of his Sentinel Wolf. About the lean jaw of that animal some one had snapped a girl's garter with a gold buckle. It stood there, like a gaily ornamented muzzle. Around the rough neck had also been tied a strand of wide pink ribbon. It was more than ludicrous; it was pathetic.

"Know what?" his wife was reiterating.

"I'm beginning to know *you,*" he equivocated, scarcely finding the courage to meet her gaze.

"Are you?" she murmured with half-closed eyes. "And what about it?"

"That's just what I've been wondering: what about it?" he repeated, much more lucidly than she must have expected, for she turned on him again with a quick and defensive movement of impatience.

"You'd better get sober before you start saying such utterly ridiculous things," she observed, with an appreciative glance over his person.

"I am sober."

"You look it," she said with a laugh.

He turned and walked away from her, confounded by a sense of frustration, oppressed by the feeling of some vast issue left clouded and inconsequential. And as he gulped down a glass of ice-water and Torrie on the other side of the room with a parade of unconcern began to make ready for bed, he wished with all the strength of his being that for a time at least he might claim the luxury of solitude, the consoling dignity of at least sleeping alone.

If his wife in any way shared that feeling she did not give the thought utterance. Before he was quite aware of it, in fact, she was lying asleep, or in a pretence of sleep. And when, an hour later, he placed himself wearily on the same bed she neither stirred nor moved.

Yet when he wakened several hours later, with the high light of noonday flooding the studio, he found himself with his right arm thrown over her hot bare shoulder and the soft curve of her back lying in its habitual nestling posture close in against his body. He saw, to his relief, that she was still sleeping heavily. So quietly and slowly, and almost with a sense of shame, he withdrew his arm from the slowly rising and falling flesh on which it was cushioned. Then inch by inch he moved over to his own side of the bed.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

STORROW was roused out of his reverie by the shrill of the telephone-bell. He glanced at Torrie, to see if it had awakened her, and then slipped quietly out of bed. He found that it was Chester Hardy calling him.

"There's something you don't know, I'm afraid, and I feel that you ought to be told," said the voice over its space-annihilating thread of metal.

"What is it?" asked Storrow, with a quick tightening of the throat as his thoughts involuntarily flew back to the woman so serenely asleep on the bed behind him. What new humiliation, he wondered, was to be flung in his face. But he soon found any apprehension of that nature to be groundless.

"Have you had any word from Charlotte Kirkner?" Hardy was asking him.

"None whatever."

"I was afraid not. Yet a couple of days ago a telegram was sent to you, a telegram"—

"That telegram never reached me," cut in Storrow, recalling that this was not the first message from the quarter in question which had been held up in transit. He found the smell of the wine-glasses crowded about the desk where he sat more than ever offensive.

"It was a telegram, I'm sorry to say, announcing the death of Mrs. Kirkner at Asheville," explained the unparticipating voice over the wire.

Storrow sat silent for a moment or two. It was not the news that was so much a shock to him, it was more the discovery that his world could have been such a nar-

rowly preoccupied one, such a deadeningly self-immuring one.

"Where is Charlotte?" he asked.

"She went out to Swansea yesterday afternoon, right after the service," explained Hardy.

"The service?" repeated Storrow.

"The funeral service," Hardy quietly amended. "And I'm afraid she feels very much alone there."

Still again a moment of silence came in the talk.

"Perhaps she would prefer being that way, under the circumstances," Storrow said, heavy with a vague misery which was not untouched with self-hate.

"She is a wonderful girl, Owen," explained Hardy, for the first time using the other's Christian name as he ascended to a new earnestness of note, "and I know that she is very fond of you, ineradicably fond of you."

"Do you mean I could still be of any possible service to her?" asked the none too happy Storrow, pushing away the glasses from which the smell of stale liquor rose in the air about him.

"I think you could," said the kindly and patient voice which even the transferring metal failed to rob of its timbre.

"I'll go right out to her," announced Storrow after one short moment of hesitation.

He made his preparations quietly, puzzled by the sustained sense of relief which came from his discovery that Torrie could sleep through it all. Yet it seemed clearer as he stood with his bag in his hand staring down at her sleeping face. That face, he could see, was more full-blooded than usual, and slightly swollen about the lips and nostrils. In the thick and heavy mat of the tangled hair still lurked a faint odour of smoke and winy emanations. About the mouth, unnaturally heavy with its still distended labial blood-vessels, he could see a faint marking of uraemic deposit. Under conditions such as those, he remembered, most faces would have looked sottish,

would have proved repellent. But he could still decipher on that sleeping face an orchid-like and exotic beauty. And the consciousness of this disturbed him profoundly. It seemed to confound the future for him, to leave more complicated the paths that awaited his feet, to cast across what should have been wide vistas of contempt a wistful overtone of adoration, of adoration touched with desire. And he was foolishly grateful for the chance of escaping from the studio, with all its residual aspects and odours of vanished merriments, while Torrie slept on unmindful of the early afternoon sunlight slanting through the skylight with its undrawn shadow-cloth.

This sense of escape, of suddenly acquired breathing-space, remained with him even after he had dispatched what impressed him as an over-long and inadequate telegram to Charlotte Kirkner and had settled himself in the train for Swansea-On-The-Sound. He forgot the weariness which an hour before had seemed anchored in his very bones. It was a long time, he remembered, since he had been in the country. All the earlier years of his life had been linked with the open. He was, in a way, a son of the wilderness. Life, for him, had never really struck root through the concrete that floored the city of his adoption. And the larger sanities of sun and wind and hilltop spaciousness would always be essential to him, would always be calling to him.

It was a crystalline February-end afternoon of open sunlight, with the earth bald of ice and snow. Once the raw and ugly husk of the city's suburbs had been left well behind he found himself confronted by umber hills mottled with pale green that stretched away to an opal skyline, umber hills with only the occasional monstrosity of gaudy-hued sign-boards to remind one of the city adjacent. There was a cool and mellow richness in the mellow tones of the broken swamplands, and already the wintry willows wore a crown of vivid yellow. There was an almost bewildering wash of light above the tangled

laceries of the tree-tops. And always before him was a suave and receding sky, suggestive of distances infinitely remote, as disquieting and provocative as the silver-sweet challenge of ever vanishing and invisible bugles. It came fully home to him, for the first time in months, that he had been missing something both stabilizing and momentous out of life.

When Storrow alighted at Swansea he found Charlotte awaiting him, flanked by what he took to be a footman in uniform, with a fur-lined rug draped over one arm, and a *chauffeur* equally statuesque. But it was a Charlotte somewhat different to the Charlotte he had so recently and so laboriously fabricated in his own mind. She was both less subdued and less funereal-looking than he had expected. She stood before him, unmistakably in the sombre black of full mourning, but with a quiet-eyed self-possession which did something more than merely proclaim that the last of her girlishness was gone. It served also as an announcement that she in her own way had known sorrow and in her own way had risen superior to it. There was, in fact, no tremor in her voice as she shook hands with him and thanked him for coming.

"Shall we send the car home," she asked in her clear and reedy voice, "and walk back across the hills?"

"Yes, let's walk back," Storrow said to her. His eyes followed her as she turned to speak to the *chauffeur* in the fur-trimmed service coat. If the dark dress under the equally dark furs was unmistakably simple, it was the simplicity of distinction, an ordered and doubly artful austerity which resulted in a final impression of richness. He noticed, as the footman took possession of his bag, that there seemed imposed upon her earlier air of shell-pink fragility an overtone of maturity touched with patience. He wondered if this arose from the fact that even against the dark furs her face carried a tint of pale bronze, an almost athletic-like darkening of pigment suggestive of wind and open air.

She smiled when he spoke of this as they struck out along the hard white road that wound hillward before them.

"That's nothing but sunburn," she said, colouring a little. They walked on for several minutes before she spoke again. "You see, Owen, I had to take myself in hand, down there at Asheville. I knew all along exactly what was ahead of me, and I had a feeling that I ought to organize for it."

Storrow stopped short.

"Wasn't it Chester Hardy first used that word to you?" he demanded.

"I think he did say something like that," admitted Charlotte, colouring still again. "But I had a problem or two to think out for myself. And I felt, sometimes, that I was going to pieces. I knew I had to get a grip on myself. So I adopted poor old Spencer's advice about our first duty to ourselves consisting in being a healthy animal. I rode every day, even when I didn't want to. I golfed and walked, and kept busy, to keep from thinking."

"And your mother?" began Storrow.

"There was so little to do, there," explained the girl at Storrow's side, with a quietness which proved a surprise to him. "She was kept under morphine, for the last two months."

"Then it was hopeless, that long?" he inadequately asked.

"It was always hopeless," was the quiet-toned response. And they walked on in silence again, for many minutes.

"And I was only making everything harder," said Storrow, breaking the silence.

"Mother thought more of you than you imagine," went on the girl, as though intent on ignoring that cry of protest. "She has given you the Lake Erie farm."

"But I don't want the Lake Erie farm," asserted the other.

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to take it against your will. Legally, in fact, it's already yours."

"How do you mean, legally?"

"It was mentioned in the will. And, as you know, it ought to have been your mother's, from the first."

"But I'd rather not talk about those things — now, of all times."

Charlotte smiled with a wintry sort of wistfulness.

"Surely, Owen, you and I don't need to be stupid and conventional. The sting has gone out of all that, and out of other things too." When she spoke again, out of the silence that ensued, it was on an altogether different subject. "I'm so glad about your book."

"Who told you?"

"Chester Hardy. And it's wonderful to think that you've succeeded in that first big effort."

"It's not so wonderful, if you bear in mind how Hardy helped me," acknowledged Storrow.

They were on the crest of a hill, by this time, and they stopped instinctively, to stare into the distance about them. From the windows of villas nestling low in the valley the sunlight flashed ruddily back at them, jewelling the sombre green slopes with fire. In the distance were the shouldering crests of sister hills, purple in the softening light. The wind that blew against their faces was cold, but in its mellow chilliness was a lost promise of Spring, a whisper of sternnesses relaxed, a prophecy of birth mysterious in its very remoteness.

Storrow, with a deep breath, turned and looked at the girl beside him. He was struck by a sense of rareness, an inalienable fineness of fibre, in the poised body as slim as the young elm beside which it stood. There was a new note of reliance in the abstracted eyes, apparently so eager to drink in that wide-flung vista of earth and sky translated into beauty by the ancient miracle of light.

He turned and looked away as the small black-gloved hand lifted and pointed towards the west.

"There's the Sound, where you and I nearly went under," she quietly remarked.

He stared at the blue-green stretch of colour, flashing with its silver and golden scales of drift-ice.

"There are so many different ways of going under," he finally asserted.

"But you never will, Owen," was Charlotte's equally low-toned reply. "I like to think of you as invincible."

"That seems to imply that I impress you as having odds to fight against," he replied, foolishly over-sensitive to the demands he must have made on her faith.

"But you'll never regard them as that," she bravely contended. "In some way, at the end, you'll win out. I know you will."

"Then I'm losing, as things now are?" he asked, meeting her gaze.

"I didn't say that," she replied, knitting her brows, without knowing it, as she lost herself in a prolonged and judicial inspection of his face. She noticed the slow wave of colour that crept up to his forehead, and turned away to stare out over the Sound. It was not until they had crossed a meadow and passed through a gate that brought them back to the highway that Charlotte spoke again.

"You know, Owen, that nearly everything in my life has tended to make me smug. And I hate smugness. Sometimes, lately, I have even felt that I hate goodness. It seems to imply the things that are neutral and passive and trivial. At least that's the kind of goodness that has always seemed to shut me in. And I've come to have a horror of being shut in, as though I was always being kept behind window-glass. And when you come to think of it, I always *have* been behind window-glass — the window-glass of home, the window-glass of hotels, the window-glass of railway trains, the window-glass of

a limousine. I never asked for it; I never wanted to be sheltered that way. But I was. And all the while I was a kind of impostor without quite knowing it. Inside of me was a big black spirit of revolt, like a barrel of dynamite buried in a prim little New England flower-garden. That's one reason why I'm here. I couldn't stand that solemn, big Brooklyn house. I couldn't have endured all those unspeakable people in black for another hour. So I took the bit in my teeth and bolted. I began to see just how you must have felt last autumn, when you went back to the city. The only difference was that I'd always been too cowardly to fight for my freedom."

Storrow's thoughts went back to that over-stately and over-secluded home, stamped with the ponderous seal of its well-being, standing so imperturbably and so firmly established in the upper airs of that hungrily crowded city where all such altitude once seemed something to be envied. Yet its dignity was a retrospective one, made up of restraint and ponderous respectability façaded with liveried servants, a fussily slow-moving semi-cloistral and semi-nomadic life concocted of periodic migrations and polite charities, of subscription concerts and decorous church interests, of sedately restrained shopping-tours and heavily engineered receptions, of a jealously meticulous cultivation of the Old Order and a closed door against the New. And in the midst of it, apparently, this girl who had been brought up behind window-glass, as she complained, had been forced to fight for her pallid vitality as grass covered by a board must fight for life.

"You have no idea, Owen," she was saying to him, "of the wickednesses I'd be capable of. I don't think I'm more of an outlaw than other women, but I feel that I've been cheated. I've a sort of ache to get even with the world, the same sort of hunger to dance your feet off that a girl has when she finds a car-accident has kept her two hours late for an Assembly night at Sherry's."

Storrow was no longer laughing at her.

"We all want our share of happiness," he acknowledged. "And trying to get it is what makes such a muddle of life."

She stopped short and looked at him with almost defiant eyes.

"But it's not happiness that I want," she contended. "What I want is life itself. I want to be bigly and keenly alive, even if it's going to make me suffer. I'm beginning to have a sort of horror of just wasting and withering up. I'd rather see a cyclone smash the whole conservatory. I've tired of being suppressed and sedate and guarded. I'm beginning to realize that I'm a really dangerous woman. It's not that I feel something coming; it's more the necessity for something to come. And I warn you, Owen, that if you cross my path when I'm flying my red flag of anarchy, I'll make you open your eyes considerably wider than they are at this moment."

He could afford, by this time, to laugh at her openly.

"Being wicked in that awful way, Charlotte," he told her, "is really an art, and like all arts it has its own particular technique, a technique which has to be acquired." Then of a sudden he grew serious again, for his thoughts were swinging back to the city he had left behind him and the woman he had left behind him. He himself had been callow and cramped and narrow, and Torrie had known the wise woman's clouded glory of bringing him wisdom. Then he remembered what she had once said about the drabness of life and how too much monotony might not unnaturally be expected to lead to an eruption.

"And acquiring a technique implies a teacher, doesn't it?" Charlotte was inquiring.

"Sometimes several of them," retorted her companion, with his thoughts still back in the city.

"You don't seem to take my wickedness very seriously," complained the solemn-eyed girl at his side.

"I can't. It's too self-conscious. And nothing, as some one has said, survives being thought of."

"Then I'll have to shock you into respecting it, after all," was the other's meditative reply.

Yet that night at dinner, as he sat opposite her in the high-ceilinged and shadowy dining-room, almost oppressed by the ordered silence which the quiet movements of the liveried servants only seemed to accentuate, he wakened to a realization that her confession had not been without its causes. She seemed an infinitely fragile and isolated figure muffled in the over-voluminous tapestry of tradition, a tapestry too unwieldy to be draped as she wished. She stood forlornly involved in the complicated agencies of comfort which failed to bring comfort, as oppressed by their meaningless ramifications as a song-sparrow intimidated by the drone of a machine-shop. And in her, only too plainly, was awakening some need for rhapsody, some call of the soul for its human right to know and suffer.

"What would you advise?" she asked across the oblong of white damask that separated them, apparently reading his thoughts.

"I'd advise prayers being offered up, Charlotte, for the idle rich, the same as for those in peril on the sea," he replied, with an effort to shoulder aside her solemnity. But her answering smile was as brief as it was preoccupied.

"I've been thinking of taking up nursing," she announced, "of going into training."

"But what would you do about — about all this?" asked Storrow, with a glance about the ponderously furnished room.

"Escape from it," was the prompt reply.

Storrow, as the liveried servant placed the gold-lined cup of *café noir* before him, and beside it the *cognac,* and beside the *cognac* the heavily chased cigarette-box,

and beside that again the little blue-flamed alcohol-torch in its burnished silver container, could not help remembering that this efficient machinery of service was not without its consolations. There crept back to his mind a picture of the crowded and disordered studio which he had so recently forsaken. He recalled the sense of being cabined and cramped, the discomfort of enforced and over-intimate contact with another, the recurrent momentously puny questions of housekeeping, the matutinal worry as to supply and demand, the inconveniences and exiguities of a daily routine which seemed so unduly to magnify the importance of appetite and its appeasement. That, after all, was what men and women struggled to escape. And this other, in the end, was what most men toiled and plotted to achieve. It was only another phase of that eternal quest for freedom for which men sold their souls and women not infrequently their bodies.

"But why should you want to be a trained nurse?" Storrow asked, not unconscious of the sacrifices any such move would involve.

Charlotte, before replying, dismissed the liveried manservant with the impassive and mask-like face.

"There isn't much I believe in, Owen," she said when they were alone. "But I do know that somewhere deep inside of me is a spark that must be kept alive, that brings a sort of tragedy into our lives when we let it go out. It's something more than the wonder of life, though the wonder of life is something we can't permit to die in us. I suppose it's more a gift, the gift of some final belief in things. And that's mixed up in some way with another gift which women have. You can call it devotion, or you can call it the blind longing to be of service. You can call it anything you like. But it's there, and if you ignore its voice, you pay for that neglect, the same as you pay for the neglect of your body."

Storrow, as he stared across the table at the girl in the high-backed chair, found something solemnifying in this unexpectedly candid confession of faith.

"If you feel that way, Charlotte," he said out of the silence that had fallen over them, "why don't you marry?"

"That," she told him, "is out of the question."

"Why?"

"Because," she said with quiet candour, "the man I was in love with married another woman."

Her gaze, directed valiantly into Storrow's slightly flinching eyes, left no shadow of doubt as to her meaning.

"But there are so many men," he murmured, extenuatingly, out of a silence even more prolonged than the first.

"But wasn't it a fellow-countryman of yours who once said:

"The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one."

. . . . . .

You know the rest!"

Storrow knew the rest. He also knew as he sat gazing across the intervening oblong of damask, that the quiet-eyed girl with the wistful smile was no longer the shell-pink shepherdess of Dresden china that he had once considered her. Time had brought its changes to her, had brought maturity, had brought courage, had brought a ripening vigour which could even prove disquieting to the man on whom her eyes were resting with an almost meditative defiance. Yet more disturbing to him than their defiance was the intervening milder light which suffused and softened them. In that gaze, too, he beheld audacity, though he tried to tell himself it was merely the unconsidering audacity of youth. He remembered, with an eruptive bodily warmth which left him with a nettling skin, an earlier scene in that house, a scene which,

through no decipherable fault of his own, recurred to him with a persistent sense of the ignominious.

Charlotte herself must have fathomed the cause of his momentary discomfort, for she laughed a little as she pushed back her chair.

"Are you still impregnable?" she asked as she came and stood beside him.

"I'm afraid I'm still stupid," he clumsily replied, puzzled by a fluttering note of what seemed like disdain in her voice. Yet a vast tranquillity possessed her face as she placed one hand on his head.

"It's not stupidity, Owen," she told him. "It's honesty. It's that dreadful disheartening honesty which I thought they were taking away from you."

"I wouldn't bank on it too much," he said with a forlorn effort at lightness, acutely conscious of her nearness. And that nearness had brought flashing back to his mind the familiar intimate approaches of Torrie.

"Look at me," she commanded, as she turned his slightly averted head. "Even now, at this very moment, you are thinking about another woman!"

"On the contrary," he protested, "I was thinking very much about you."

"What were you thinking?" she diffidently inquired.

"How lovely you look," he compelled himself to acknowledge. And that declaration was true enough, in its way, but she seemed conscious of its deficiencies.

"Dear old dissembler," she said with her wintry smile. "You won't even give me a taste of power, the power every woman is so famished to feel. And you *are* impregnable!"

He rose to his feet close beside her, and their glances met and locked. They locked together, not altogether challengingly, not altogether combatively. But in that long look dwelt something denuding and isolating, as though the world were ebbing slowly away beneath them, leaving them poised in inter-stellar emptiness.

"You are not impregnable," she said very quietly, as she closed her eyes.

He took a step towards her. He took a step in her direction and then turned towards the table. For a door had opened and a servant stood before him. As Storrow made that movement the memory of Vibbard's movement towards his Sentinel Wolf flashed back in his mind, bringing with it an inundating and emancipating wave of self-hate.

"You are wanted at the telephone, sir," he heard the servant announcing.

"I?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," was the impassive response.

"But it must be some mistake. There's no one could possibly want"—

He did not finish.

"It's Mrs. Storrow, sir," explained the footman. "And she said that it was urgent."

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE air of ghostliness about every-day objects, the vague sense of unreality in familiar things, taking possession of Storrow on his return to the city did not remain with him for any ponderable length of time. Old scenes and old habits promptly caught him up in their course, as the steel rails catch a car making a flying switch, and guided him back into a flat and familiar world.

Even Torrie's matter of urgency, so mysteriously withheld, failed to impress him, once he was back in the studio, as anything approaching the momentous. It was merely that *The Seventh Wave* company had been reorganized for a road tour and Krassler had sent a hurried call for her to rejoin the departing forces.

"And why couldn't that have been mentioned over the telephone?" asked Storrow, resenting the natural inference that he had been deliberately manipulated, that for an ulterior purpose he had been kept on the tenter-hooks of anxiety. Yet Torrie's almost colourless face remained impassive, even before his unmodified note of mockery.

"I felt that you might not want me to go out with that road company. And long-distance wasn't the place for carrying on an argument about it — especially after spending over an hour in finding you."

He stared at her, with a singular detachment of mind, unimpressed by the note of bitterness in her voice, for all its quietness. What did succeed in impressing him, however, was the weariness of the white face, heavy about the eyes and mouth, the listlessness that had im-

posed itself upon the once ardent and child-like contours.

"You weren't always so considerate of my feelings," he retorted, steeling his heart against her pose of unprotesting world-weariness.

"What do you mean by that?" she almost triumphantly challenged, glad, apparently, to find a prolonged and benumbing constraint breaking out at last into a clarifying storm of words.

"I mean that a telegram was delivered here three days ago, and I never got it. A message for me!"

She looked up at him steadily.

"You were much too drunk to do anything when that wire came, even if you could have understood it," she quietly explained.

"But that message was for me," he reiterated.

"Well, it's somewhere about. Nobody's keeping it from you."

"But it was kept from me," he contended. "And you succeeded in humiliating me before"—

"Before whom?" she cut in, jealously, at his moment of hesitation.

"Before my relatives." It sounded inadequate, and he knew it.

"Well, I can't see that those relatives ever did very much for me, or for you either," she scornfully exclaimed.

He began to see how foolish and futile it all was. He turned away from her with a movement that was both angry and dismissive. But she still stood before him, with what he accepted as a mere pretence of timidity.

"After all, it was *me* you married," she said in a voice that was thin with misery. Her moods, he decided, were beyond him. They were incomprehensible in their capriciousness, a mixture of steel and rose-leaves, a confusion of ice and flame.

"Yes, it was you I married," he slowly repeated, beholding the point of that scornful reiteration pierce like

a sabre into the softness of her body, as he had intended that it should. Yet there was no touch of joy to his triumph. He had looked for another outburst from her, at that, a noisy fusillade of anger that would have eased his soul of its rancour, that would have purged from his mind the accumulating miseries which seemed without an honest and adequate outlet. But she suddenly impressed him as pitiful before the crude flail of his scorn. He wondered how men could come to hate that which had once been so involved with their rapture and desire. The contact of body with body, he found, resulted in something more psychic and more enduring than the mere conjunction of flesh. What was known as love between man and woman, establishing itself as something more than the sexual glow through which it expressed and exhausted itself, by a mysterious out-thrusting of emotional filaments could still bind bewilderingly together the bodies that darker passion seemed bent on dividing. The glow remembered, the secrecies shared, he was to find, could still with their ghostly voices recall and reclaim the past. And now, with something dangerously close to hate burning in his heart, he found pity unnerving him. Women, he remembered, were frail and flexible, were more played upon by their environment, were susceptible to influences unknown to men. It was the duty of the strong, accordingly, to protect the weak. And with Torrie, after all, it was a matter of weakness, of surrender to impulse. She did not differ from other women, except that she was more vital. Even Charlotte Kirkner, sheltered and sensitive, as fine-fibred as women were made, had betrayed a promise of outlawry, a potentiality of revolt from the timeworn paths of Right. It was man who sentimentalized women, who established false standards towards which they were forced to strain. That was something he had learned from the city which harboured him. And with it he wistfully feathered the nest of Compromise.

"Then the thing is settled!" It was the voice of Torrie speaking in a tone singularly remote and final. Already she seemed to be accosting him from beyond a gulf of terrifying dimensions.

"What thing?" he demanded, disturbed in spite of himself.

"About my going," was her answer. Already, he fancied, he could detect about her a valedictory air, a retrospective and autumnal pensiveness which brought a wave of misery once more surging over him.

"What settled it?" he asked, waywardly impelled to reach out to her even as he realized that such an approach would be too vast a surrender.

"The fact that you're tired of me," was her answer.

"Have I ever said that?" he temporized.

"No, but it's made plain enough by your actions."

"It's not only *my* actions that have been open to question," he countered.

"Then I ought to go where mine won't be a source of trouble to you," was Torrie's retort. It was said with apparent thoughtlessness, and yet it came to Storrow barbed with menace. He recalled haphazard impressions of road-companies, impressions picked up from motion-pictures and Broadway romances and studio gossip. He remembered what Chester Hardy had said to him about stage-life. And the thought of her once more engulfed in that devastating environment became unbearable. To surrender her to such a life seemed a contradiction of every protectional instinct in his being. It seemed the end — the end of everything.

He crossed the room to the window and stood staring out.

"I'd rather you didn't go," he said in a strained voice, without turning his head.

She stood watching him, without changing her position. "Why not?" she asked.

"I don't want you to go," he repeated, almost brusquely.

And that was all that came of the matter, at the time, for Torrie, with the unrelaxed lines of thought still furrowing her creamy forehead, made it a point to absent herself from the studio as soon as she could withdraw without any seeming sacrifice of dignity.

Yet the question was brought up again, two hours later, when Pannie Atwill invaded the studio and found Storrow there, alone in the paling afternoon light.

"How's things?" she lightly inquired as she discarded the white fox furs which encased her up to the eyes.

"Tangled up, as things most always seem to be," responded Storrow, anticipating her hand-reach for the cigarette-box.

"Where's the odalisk?" asked Pannie, with a glance about the room.

"What do you mean?" demanded Storrow.

"Where's the *frau?*"

"Shopping, I believe," answered Storrow.

"Gettin' ready for the grape-vine circuit?"

Still again Storrow did not understand her.

"Gettin' ready to go out with that Krassler bunch?" she said by way of exegesis.

"I hardly think so."

"She's goin', ain't she?" demanded Pannie.

"She is not," asserted Storrow.

"Odalisk is right," observed Pannie, under her breath. Then she blew a smoke-ring, and through that blew a smaller one. "Hermie will throw a fit, when he gets hep to that. He thinks he can smooth out that play on the rubes and bring it back to Broadway a knock-out. And he intended Torrie to be the big splash when they hit this Hudson levee again."

"But Torrie wasn't the star of that production," contended Storrow. "She didn't even have the lead."

"Of course she didn't, dearie," acknowledged Pannie. "But Krassler was nursin' her like an eighteen-inch naval gun. He was keepin' her tarpaulined down until the Broadway openin', and then he was goin' to let her loose and smother the performance. Hully gee, man, why do you suppose he was belascoin' 'round here in private, and coachin' her under cover, and frettin' and workin' his crazy little kike heart out if it wasn't to give her her Big Chance?"

Storrow seemed slow to absorb the situation which Pannie thought she had made plain to him.

"But why should Krassler go out of his way to manœuvre her into a chance which couldn't have been quite legitimate?" he asked.

"Oh, it's legitimate all right, once you can get away with it," announced Pannie, with the wisdom of the serpent in her artless young eyes.

"But why should he do it, or want to do it?"

An invisible shutter was drawn down over the wise young face.

"I guess Hermie had banked on Torrie gettin' away with it," she offhandedly acknowledged.

It occurred to Storrow that Hermie was banking altogether too much on the lady in question, though he resisted the impulse to assert the same to the sophisticated young woman confronting him. He was growing into a clearer perception of the fact that Krassler's interest in Torrie was something more than a professional one. And once that fact became established in his mind he grew more fixed in his opposition to his wife's adventuring forth with a road-company. And Torrie herself, after a day or two of opposition, gave up the idea. She bent to his will, apparently impressed by the fact that an opposite course would lead to a break that would prove final. Her surrender, however, was not an unqualified one. There was a note of constraint, sometimes almost a note of bitterness, in her attitude towards Storrow.

She was depressed for a day when a Buffalo paper, sent back through the mail, brought an exceptionally long and enthusiastic review of *The Seventh Wave.*

But she said nothing about it to her husband.

Storrow himself, with his novel finally disposed of, was already hard at work at a short story or two. His struggles in this new medium were not mild ones, for he was determined to push them through to an end without in any way calling on Hardy for help. His progress was slow and his first results were far from satisfactory. When his second efforts seemed equally futile he became depressed and morose. Torrie, in fact, even announced that living with a bilious author was worse than living with a bear with a sore paw, and advertised her intention of giving him the studio to himself as much as she was able. This policy of absentation flowered in a later announcement that Donnie Eastman was getting up a series of historical *tableaux,* at the Biltmore, and that she had accepted his offer to take part in a couple of the groups.

To this Storrow offered no objections, though he found it presented as an excuse for more and more prolonged absences, for unexpected telephone-calls, for surprisingly late home-comings to the studio. And through it all Storrow nursed a sense of waiting for something, something which he was unable to define. When he asked himself if it were release, he was unable to define the thing from which he sought liberation. When he pondered if it were merely the promise of Spring working in his nomad's blood, he could see no possible change to come from the changing season.

But as the Winter slipped away he found himself possessed by a listlessness which he could not explain. The appeal seemed to have gone out of the city about him, which cared neither for his happiness nor his misery, his success nor his failure. He became a victim of that vague indifferency imposed upon him by the dwarfing

influences of numbers. The city humbled a man, he found. And it also tended to obliterate him.

Yet he remembered, word for word, what Charlotte Kirkner had said about life. "Somewhere deep inside of us is a spark that must be kept alive, a light that brings a sort of tragedy into our lives when we let it go out." And whatever happened, he told himself as he went back to his work very much like going back to the side of an old and dependable comrade, that light must live.

One raw and blustery afternoon when March gave every promise of going out like a lion he was alone in his studio, going over the proofs of his book. This task, with its evidences of definite accomplishment, brought with it an unexpected revival of spirits. He had, after all, created something, of his own wit made something to redeem him from blank namelessness, left a record for others to read and understand. And this thing of his own, clothed now in the authority of print, fortified him with a new and timorous pride. When a knock sounded on his door he rose to answer it abstractedly, still thinking of a purple patch which had been able to quicken his pulse a trifle. He even wondered, in a brief and fragmentary way, if the resolution of life's fever were buttressed on work, and work alone.

"D' yuh use models, at all — models such as me?" a husky and none too hopeful voice was inquiring of him out of the gloom.

Storrow found himself staring at a great hulk of a man, with rain dripping from his ragged coat-edges. There was something reminiscent about that Titanic and melancholy figure, a mist of memory shot through with pain. Then Storrow understood.

It was Michael Mullaly, the one-time engineer of *The Alwyn Arms*, the drunkard who had beaten his wife at the bottom of a fire-escape and opened the door of an adventure leading to dark and unlooked for consequences.

"Come in," said Storrow, stepping back as the sodden

figure lumbered past him. And he was neither gladdened nor saddened to behold that once defiant Hercules so sorry and suppliant a figure. Calamity and the cup that cheers had plainly marked him as their own. Silently the two men confronted each other in the clearer light of the studio. Slowly recognition crept into the blinking Celtic eyes.

"Why, yuh're the lad"— began Mullaly. Then discretion brought him up short, with an uncomfortable hitch of the giant hips.

"Yes, I'm the man," said Storrow, understandingly, with a glance down at the other's open and leaking shoes.

The dilapidated Goliath studied his old-time enemy. He stood a little bewildered at the discovery that no enmity lurked in the other's glance.

"That was a grand fight," he finally averred, with guile. "A grand fight!"

"Did it strike you that way?" asked Storrow, his thoughts a mile away.

"Yuh had me beat, me lad, yuh had me beat from the first!" He shook his bull head heavily. "But yuh'll niver find wimmen-folk fightin' fair. Yuh will not!" he protested, by way of extenuation, as he looked about for a chair, sank into it unbidden, and placed his wet hat on the floor beside him.

Storrow remained silent. It had been a foolish fight, he remembered, a tragically foolish fight. He noticed Mullaly's wandering eye come to a stop at the decanter on the buhl table. That decanter, during the ensuing silence, seemed to loom larger and larger in his visitor's consciousness, until it alone remained, mountainously reminded, with the light striking amber and gold and provocatively mellow through its core.

So Storrow, still without speaking, carried the rye and a glass and a plate of biscuits to the side of the wet and bedraggled Hercules. And Mullaly, no longer blinking, filled the glass and took it "neat." The blue

lips smacked appreciatively. Then the faded blue eye gazed dolorously down at the emptied glass. So lugubrious was that contemplation of patent emptiness, in fact, that Storrow nodded. The man was wet and chilled, and in need of warmth. And without further ceremony Mullaly repeated the operation of promptly filling and just as promptly emptying the glass again.

"And that gerrl?" asked Mullaly, after another silence, as he crossed his ponderous moist legs. "Had yuh iver seen her b'fore that day?"

Storrow acknowledged that he had not.

"And I've been thinkin' yuh hadn't, this many a time," retorted Mullaly.

"Why do you say that?" demanded the other, nettled by the note of vague triumph in his visitor's voice.

"She was a bad lot, that gerrl."

Storrow, with a tightening about his heart which was reflected in the sudden hardening of his face, refilled his visitor's glass.

"I didn't know that," he observed, with argumentative impersonality, yet in the grip of that torturing vulpine craft which is the hand-maiden of suspicion.

"Why that gerrl," asserted Mullaly, leaning confidentially forward in his chair, "was a "—

"Don't use that word," Storrow sharply cut in. He remembered, with a dizzy flash of despair, how he had first heard it, that hot summer afternoon, through the rusty iron rods of a fire-escape. And it seemed a very long time ago.

"'Tis the only worrud, sir," Mullaly solemnly maintained.

"But I don't believe it," cried Storrow, white to the eyes. "I can't believe it!"

"Thin ask a little Joo stage-man be the name av Kreisler or Krissler, and see what answer yuh'll be gettin'," calmly pursued his sodden torturer. "Or that skinny ould Roosian wid a face like a tombstone and a

weakness f'r young gerrls, the same ould Roosian that O'Leary wanst put out av the Alwyn Arrums — and Gawd knows, sir, that same Alwyn Arrums was niver the abidin' place av angels!"

"That's nonsense," protested Storrow in his forlorn and bitter spirit of opposition. "*She* was never put out of *The Alwyn Arms,* and we're talking about her."

"No, she wasn't," he averred, from under glowering brows. "She wasn't, seein' she had a pull wid O'Leary himself, down in the office. And it was pull enough to have me put out ov a job I'd hild steady f'r three years, doin' the best a man could wid"—

"Was that after — after the fight you've just had the kindness to remind me of?" demanded Storrow.

"It was," retorted Mullaly, digressing into a long and lachrymose recountal of the resultant disasters. But that recital of woe and injustice was already falling on deaf ears. Storrow's mind, electrified into a morbid activity, was going over the past step by step and day by day, reviewing incidents which at the time had seemed innocent, reinterpreting them by the light of his dubious new knowledge. But he refused to accept the incredible. He lashed himself with the accusation of stark stupidity, in listening to the maunderings of a drunken and vindictive Irish janitor. The entire thing was becoming loathsome, unendurable. And as Mullaly, played on by the united warmths from without and within, betrayed unmistakable signs of surrendering to slumber, he was none too gently roused from his alcoholic stupor and helped out through the door, still quaveringly lamenting the old days when an honest man wasn't thrown out of a job without reason.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

SORROW, alone in his studio, sat down and struggled to straighten out a disorganized world. But always between him and what promised to be tranquillity stood that mocking and leering suspicion which proved too intangible to be combated and too persistent to be ignored. As he sat confronted by uncertainties which could prove more torturing than truth itself his unhappy and wandering eyes rested on his wife's trunk, the steel-bound theatrical trunk which stood so definite and so personal a part of her belongings. He had unquestioningly and unconsciously respected the privacy of that trunk, accepting what it held as something essentially and personally hers, the accrued possessions of the past it was her privilege to cherish and to screen, if she so desired. Then he remembered the little chamois bag of jewels, the locked make-up box which held them, and the carefully tied bundle of letters which rested there beside them.

Then he looked away, finding the thought of spying inexpressibly abhorrent. But still again his glance went back to the dark mass of the trunk, sarcophagus-like in its ponderousness, and still again he felt the tug of suspicion, demanding that it be verified or for all time rejected. Finally he surrendered to an impulse which proved too strong for him, and crossed to the trunk and opened it.

He could vaguely foresee, as he lifted out the first make-up box, in which, he remembered, the key to the lower box was hidden, that what he was about to do involved the danger of bringing him vast misery, of thrust-

ing into his hands some damning truth which might forever strike down what was left of his happiness. Yet the demand for knowledge, he found, was stronger than his dread of it. To know, to be certain; that was the only, the vital, the essential thing.

Then, as his search through the make-up box ended and revealed the key to be missing, a surge of something oddly akin to relief swept through him. Circumstance, less fluid than his own will, was compelling him to draw back from that disheartening prospecting after misery. And he was glad to be through with it. Yet, he contended as he fell to pacing the room, the mere fact that the key had been taken away from its customary hiding-place implied a reason for its removal. Torrie, suspicious of his own possible suspiciousness, had not unnaturally decided to protect herself, had recognized some newer need for secrecy.

He went back to the trunk again, searching it from end to end for the missing key. He was assailed as he did so by a strange mingling of odours, the faint smell of grease-paint and cosmetics, the vague perfumes, from formless silk finery, of orris and patchouli and *Apres Londi*, the heavy mustiness of garments long unused. They brought to him a disturbing sense of their owner's nearness, a silently rebuking ghost of her gazing down over his shoulder. But this did not deter him. He was now determined, in fact, that nothing should deter him.

So fixed was he in this purpose that when he disinterred the second make-up box from under its paint-soiled towel in a lower tray he first made sure that it was locked and then carried it across the room to his work-desk. Then he returned to the trunk, replaced the trays, and shut down the lid.

Before proceeding deeper into that campaign of espionage he crossed to the studio door and locked it. His fingers were trembling a little, he noticed, as he took up the japanned tin box, so battered and stained and bruised,

and attempted to force up the lid with a knife from his kitchenette. This was possible, he saw, but it would leave the lock broken, the irrefutable evidence of his violation of confidence. By this time, too, he had become calmer. The guile of the stalker, even with his own happiness as the quarry, had returned to him.

He wrapped up the box in a sheet of drawing-paper and carried it to a Twenty-Third Street basement locksmith, explaining that he had lost the key and would like a duplicate. An uncomfortable sense of guilt crept over him as the locksmith took the box in his hand, inspected it, and then with an equally pointed stare inspected Storrow. It would not be an easy key to cut, the mechanic explained, but it could be done by noon the next day, if the box were left with him. That, Storrow confusedly explained, was out of the question. Then the simplest procedure, the locksmith retorted, pointing to the maker's name on the lid, was to take the box to the Broadway store where it had been bought and have a duplicate fitted.

Storrow, with the feelings of a safe-cracker burdened with over-suspicious loot, proceeded to the Broadway store in question. There the box was promptly fitted with a key which he paid for and pocketed. Then with a quickened pulse he made his way back to the studio.

As he crossed Fifth Avenue at Twenty-Sixth Street he heard himself accosted from a passing taxi-cab.

"Hello, Captain Kidd!" cried a voice close beside him. The appositeness of that salute sent a tingle through the body against which a ravaged treasure-chest was so tightly pressed. He glanced up to see Mattie Crowder's hectically calsomined face laughing down at him from the door of the slowly moving cab. He recovered himself and called back at her with an assumption of lightheartedness which later impressed him as vapidly ludicrous. He was relieved when he was once more able to lock himself safely in the studio.

There, with a deliberation which was a mild surprise to him, he proceeded to examine the contents of the box. He found the soiled chamois bag with its rings and trinkets. He found a small silver watch without a crystal, a sheaf of newspaper-clippings and theatrical programs, and a champagne-cork with a date written on it, in lead-pencil. He found a druggist's prescription and the dinner-card of a coast-steamer, overscored with unmistakably clever drawings interspersed with humorous and affectionate comments. He found two reservation-slips, with the dates obliterated, for drawing-rooms on the West Shore Railway, between Weehawken and Buffalo. Then came a few soiled dance-favours, the remnants of a small cluster of violets which had once, apparently, been pressed between the leaves of a book, and a small gold pocket-pencil minutely indented, as though it had been repeatedly and meditatively held between firm and pointed teeth. Next came a photograph of Torrie, in costume, with the inscription, " My first part," written in ink across the bottom, a snap-shot of five laughing girls clustered about the steps of a Pullman car, and still another small picture of Torrie in her youth, revealing a soft-eyed and smooth-cheeked girl in her early teens, flower-like in her freshness, with wonder touched by curiosity on the rapt young face above the archaic-looking fichu and the over-heavy locket that nestled in its frills.

The last thing which Storrow lifted out was the package of letters tied together with a cherry-coloured ribbon. He had responded, without being quite conscious of it, to some law of dramatic climax which prompted him to defer what promised to prove the vital movement until the end. He remembered, as he untied the tightly knotted ribbon with the feeling that he was opening a door on the past, how a great dramatist had once proclaimed the future to be only the past entered by another door. Yet he was unnaturally calm as he crossed that threshold

from which he felt he might turn away a strangely altered man. He even prided himself on his self-control, though his quickened breathing stood an acknowledgment of the tax which that control was imposing upon him. Then he stopped breathing altogether, for the first letter which he unfolded and inspected began with the pregnant words "My Beloved Wild-Bird."

He read it through until he came to the signature, which was the one word "Alan." He read them all, page by page, every impetuous and passionate line, every endearing diminutive, every acknowledgment of immense and abandoned love. After that, there was no more doubt. Carefully he re-read an allusion to the painting of *The Rainy Morning,* an allusion which implied it had been done before a lover's quarrel with Torrie. It left no question as to Torrie herself being the model for that canvas. Yet this discovery came to him now with small sense of shock. It was merely one voice in a droning choir of accusation. And he read on, harvesting his grim sheaves of knowledge, stopping only once, with a convulsive twitching of the body, when he happened on a ragged-edged sheet of note-paper in Torrie's own writing, a sheet apparently sent back to her in a moment of reproof.

"Oh, My Own, my Belovedest Own who is All Mine," she had written in her sharp-angled script, though in this instance much less cramped and pointed than usual. "I feel today that it's glorious to be a woman! It's glorious, glorious to be loved, to know that you are in a man's thoughts, to remember that you control him, even when he is away from your touch, to remember too that he is longing for you, no matter how far he goes, *you,* just *you,* nobody in all the wide, wide world but *you!* And it's glorious to feel yourself in his arms, and his eyes drinking the depths of yours, when he's with you again, hungry for you, eager for you, aching for you! Yes,

dear, it's glorious to be a woman — to be a woman in love, and a woman beloved!"

Storrow sat for a full moment, without moving, after reading this for the second time. Then he deliberately restored the sheet to its place and just as deliberately went on with his examination. His movements were quiet, with the quietude of that torpor which comes from over-tensioned nerves and over-taxed feeling. He refused to be startled, even to the end, assuring and reassuring himself that he had already discounted everything upon which he might stumble. He imposed upon himself a restraint which turned in upon his own soul the fires to which he refused any freedom of escape. He had sown his dragon's teeth, and now he could reap the whirlwind. . . .

The one dominant feeling that remained with him as he tied up the letters and replaced them in the make-up box and restored that box to the trunk where it belonged, was a feeling of having been duped, tragically and colossally duped. Yet even this impressed him as pettish and deficient in dignity, trivial before the gigantic sweep of passion which was supposed to ensue upon all such discoveries as his. Beyond this vague and far-reaching sense of betrayal, however, he found the crystallization of mere suspicion into certainty to be shot through with a colouring of relief. He knew now what he had to fight against.

He had reached the stage, in fact, when he could stand forlornly proud of his self-possession. He even made it a point to establish his self-control by returning to his work on the proof-sheets. He held himself to that task with a will of iron, going through them page by page, with a sullen and self-defeating determination. Often, indeed, he found his thoughts wandering. But always he shepherded them relentlessly back, finding it necessary to read a sentence several times before its true import filtered through to his mind. When he had reached the

last page he methodically rearranged the loose sheets, folded them together, and sealed them in their brown manilla envelope. On this envelope he wrote the name and address of his publishers and affixed an unnecessary number of postage stamps. Then with the movements of a man who was very tired he put on his hat and coat and carried his package to the nearby sub-station drop-wicket at the Eastern end of the Metropolitan Building, just north of Twenty-Third Street. He went through these movements automatically, with practically no memory of having executed them. When he saw that it was midnight by the huge illuminated dial so high above him he just as automatically turned homeward again, reminding himself that the hour was late and that men at some such hour as this had the habit of going to bed.

He stopped at the corner of Twenty-Fourth Street as he beheld a lean and hungry-looking cat reaching up to the top of a garbage-can placed on the curb. It made his thoughts go back to *The Alwyn Arms* and the gaunt and straining cat he had once caught sight of, through the bars of a fire-escape, as it reached whining with desire up to a windowsill on which a pan of cardinal-red lobsters stood cooling.

Then he thought of Rodin's *La Porte de l'Enfer* and the creatures of desire writhing and coiling about that great door. He would satisfy at least one hunger, he decided, as he made an effort to catch the animal skulking in the corner of his house-steps. He would take it up to his room and feed it, give it the meal of its life. But that harried street-cat, unused to kindness, was not easy to approach. Storrow even followed it into the shadowed area beneath the steps themselves, stooping low and striving to disarm its suspicions.

He suddenly stood erect, still in the shadow, for a motor-car had stopped at the curb within ten paces of him. From this car he saw a man step slowly down and swing open the door. At the same time that he realized

this man to be Donnie Eastman he saw the second alighting figure.

He knew it was Torrie even before he caught the sound of her contented little coo of laughter as the heavily-ulstered man ushered her up the worn sandstone steps, with one hand clasping her crooked arm at the elbow.

On the top step they came to a full stop. No word was spoken, but each, apparently swayed by the same impulse, glanced first eastward and then westward along the empty street. Then, still without a spoken word, they stood clasped for a moment in each other's arms. And still without speaking the woman withdrew into the darkness of the house and the man in the ulster, after standing for a moment in abstracted contemplation of his car, slowly went down the steps, lighted a cigarette, and slithered off eastward into the night, with a ruby light winking back as he bobbed over the car-tracks of Fourth Avenue.

Slowly Storrow emerged from his sheltering shadow, feeling his way up the sandstone steps as a blind man might. He stood under the faded door-lintel, with one shoulder against the worn and blistered frame, staring out at the brownstone arroyo of blank doors and drawn blinds and quavering with a nauseous ague which he seemed unable to control. It was not anger that shook him. It was not shame and it was not disgust. It seemed, at the moment, a black and all-suffusing hopelessness, a hopelessness which left his body cold and his heart numb.

Then a reaction apparently more physical than mental set in, and he found himself burning with an inarticulate fury of protest, wave by mounting wave, until relief in action seemed essential. Yet he fought against that sudden hot thirst to mount to the studio and confront the woman who sooner or later would have to be confronted. Before that encounter, he warned himself, he must be under complete self-control. He was sure of himself

now, and of his line of procedure. He could afford to await his time.

He stepped out into the midnight street with a poignant feeling of homelessness gnawing at his heart, scarcely conscious of the direction in which he was moving. The sight of a belated panhandler or two drifting eastward along Twenty-Third Street arrested his attention. He watched those homing birds beating their way towards the cheap and verminous lodging-houses that lay near the East River, wondering why the human body, when ill-fed and ill-clad, ambulated thus with upthrust shoulders and forward-drooping spine. He himself, he remembered, would have to find a sleeping-place for the night. Being without hand-baggage, he sheered away from the more pretentious hotels. He felt the need, in fact, of oblivion, of violent submergence in some neutralizing physical discomfort, like that which comes to a distracted ewe flung bodily into a sheep-dip. So, after walking for an hour without sense of direction or destination, he entered without repugnance a side-street caravansary with tiers of bald little rooms above its over-gilded ground-floor saloon. There, after paying for his meagre quarters in advance, he went to bed.

But he slept little. When, towards morning, fitful and broken slumber overtook him, he was tortured with dreams of lascivious feline bodies swarming and climbing about a door draped with black. So disturbing were these dreams that he was glad to open his eyes and see sunlight slanting in through his narrow uncurtained window. He got up and dressed with the slow heaviness of an athlete after a field-day marked with many defeats, sore in body, but infinitely more bruised in soul. At the lunch-counter belowstairs he bought a roast-beef sandwich and a cup of coffee. The sandwich of indurated beef and rye-bread proved uneatable and he was staring at it with heavy listlessness when his attention was at-

tracted by a short and wide-shouldered Italian with a willow basket of plaster casts swung by a strap from his shoulder. Storrow as he gulped down his steaming but stale cup of coffee continued to watch him. The pedlar was doing his best to persuade an indifferent-eyed Irish bartender to purchase two undraped and diminutive wood-nymphs in plaster-of-Paris. But his efforts were unavailing.

Storrow stopped the Italian as he replaced his nymphs and started towards the door.

"Who makes these for you?" he asked, looking over the basket of reposing white figures. They were very badly modelled, Storrow saw, mostly nudes and demi-nudes of Phrynes and Venuses and bacchantes and bathing-girls, that type of naïvely pornographic art which had so firmly established itself beside the barber's mirror and the tapster's pyramided drinking-glasses.

"I maka dem myself," the Italian responded, not without pride.

"Do you ever feel that you'd like something better?" inquired Storrow, taking up an obese plaster dryad with ankles sufficiently generous for a Hercules.

"Wha's da matter wid dat, meester man?" demanded the Italian as he resumed jealous possession of the cast and held it up to the light.

"I'll show you what's the matter with it," responded the other, taking from his pocket the drawing pencil which he had the habit of always carrying with him. He commandeered a segment of the plaster-pedlar's wrapping paper, placed the cast on the end of the bar, and with a series of quick and miraculous strokes reproduced the figure of the dryad, translating it as he did so into a sprightly and slender-bodied nymph with life in every line.

The Italian took up the drawing and inspected it with studious and seal-brown eyes.

"You maka dese t'ings some time?" he asked, still artist enough to recognize artistry in another.

"Yes, I've made that sort of thing," acknowledged the other.

"You wanta work, maybe?" asked the owner of the studious seal-brown eyes.

"Yes," was Storrow's answer. For it suddenly struck him as desirable, this possible chance of losing himself in the maelstrom which he could no longer hope to master, of ebbing away into impenetrable corners where he would be untrammelled and untainted and unknown.

"W'at kinda work?" asked the other, still skeptical.

"Why, I could model you a raft of these things, something with life in them, something you could job out by the hundred to other pedlars, something that'd give you a real business, if you handled it right."

"W'at ees your name?"

"I'll tell you that when I come to see you. Have you got a studio?"

"Eet ees a cellaire," explained the Italian, with his Latin shrug of deprecation.

"Then I'll come and see you, if you'll write your name and address on this paper."

Laboriously the man of the plaster casts wrote on the piece of wrapping-paper "Angelo Dellazio" and after it the address-number on East Eleventh Street. It was satisfyingly remote, Storrow saw, that cellar work-room so close to the crowded fringe of the East River.

"All right, Angelo," he said as he pocketed his slip, "I'll be around before long." And he laughed, almost lightheartedly, as he stepped out through the swing doors.

Yet his face hardened as he confronted the open light of the street. He remembered, with a tightening of the throat, that he would now have to go home, or to what he had once called his home. He made an effort to defer all thought as to what stood ahead of him. He tried to concentrate his attention on the street scenes about him,

on the Spring-like smell of the air which even city dust could not dissemble, on the immensity of the city itself, of which he was such a microscopic part. Then he thought of his modelling, and for a minute or two lost himself in the fabrication of a figure emblematic of that city. He thought of that figure as a sort of Sphinx, not a desert Sphinx of inanimate stone, but as something half tigress and half woman, crouched above a pile of bones. These bones, he told himself, were the bones of her victims.

Then as he turned into Madison Square, he caught sight of the gilded *Diana* poised high above her Sevillian towers, and he dismissed that thought of an urban Sphinx as a foolish one.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

TWO things impressed Storrow as he let himself into the studio with his own latch-key. One was the quietness and gloom of the building, after the stark sunlight and noise of the open street. The other was his personal reaction to this new environment, prompting him to move almost stealthily. It made him think of the big moment of suspense in a melodrama, with the stage expectantly darkened and that anticipational hush which precedes a dramatic outburst.

Yet he found, as he quietly closed the door behind him, that no big moment awaited him. Torrie lay asleep on the bed, with her back to him. The curtain by an opened window was blowing lazily in the breeze. A litter of *lingerie* cascaded over a chair-back. A faint drone of steam came from one of the radiators.

Storrow looked back at the bed. The curve of his wife's back reminded him of the back of a sleeping kitten. He searched the lines of that relaxed figure for some appeasing ugliness, for something to start into motion the sullen machinery of indignation. But he stood slightly bewildered, slightly disheartened, by the aspect of innocence which she could still wear in her slumber. About the soft line of the neck, below the heavy cloud of the tumbled hair, was a disturbing air of delicacy. What he could see of her face seemed perversely child-like, with its smooth milkiness of skin. And even the fact that she could sleep so soundly, so abandonedly, that she could lie so passive and unresisting before his eyes, seemed to blunt the edge of all his earlier determinations.

He knew he would have to wait.

He crossed to the small bath-room in the corner of the room and looked at himself in the mirror. He stood startled at his own appearance. He saw a face that was unshaven, dishevelled, strangely hard and bony, with a sinister expression of age and cruelty about the red-rimmed eyes. He was not even clean. He reminded himself of a stoker emerging from a furnace-room.

Automatically he proceeded to shave. Then he stripped to the waist and washed the thick mat of his hair, almost forgetting himself as he splashed like a walrus in the water that he always loved to feel on his skin. He was wiping his eyes with a heavy bath-towel when a voice sounded from the room without.

"Is that you, Honey?"

It was a soft voice, still careless-noted with sleepiness, a quietly inquiring and disturbingly friendly voice.

"Yes," Storrow answered. He could feel his heart pound. But he warned himself to be calm, for he knew he would still have to wait. So he went on with his towelling.

He was interrupted by a little flutter of laughter from the open door. But he declined to turn around.

"Why, Honey, you're like a steel-puddler. You're like a ship's gunner stripped for action!"

She referred, he remembered, to his absence of clothing from the waist-line up.

"Am I?" he coldly inquired. She was close beside him, by this time, in her thin *crêpe-de-Chine* night-dress. It seemed like an unclean and unpardonable intrusion, and it took an effort to keep him from turning and flinging her through the open door. She reached over his averted shoulder for her tooth-brush, with the unconsidering careless intimacy of the past. It seemed only a morning or two back that she had laughingly caught his bare arm between her two hands and had just as laughingly shouted:

"And the muscles of his brawny arms
Were strong as iron bands."

But now when her elbow accidentally came in contact with his flesh he suddenly flinched away, as from a burn. If she noticed that movement, she ventured no comment on it. She was humming a little as she reached out and turned the tap.

"What time did you get back last night?" asked Storrow. It took a great effort to make the question appear a casual one.

"About midnight," replied Torrie, apparently preoccupied with the task in hand.

"How did you come?" was Storrow's next question. Torrie straightened up at this, disturbed by the hardness of the other's voice.

"Mattie and I came down in a bus," she replied, with a bored intonation.

"But a bus couldn't bring you home," argued Storrow.

"No, my dear, but it brought us to Madison Square, and from there I walked to my lordly abode."

He was grateful for that note of mockery in her voice. It was food for his hate, fuel for his rancour.

"And you walked home?" he repeated, with undue deliberation.

"And without acquiring the habit of staying out all night," she coolly amended, beginning to resent his inquisitorial efforts at cross-questioning her.

"It would have been more honest, if you had," he cried out, suddenly confronting her.

She fell back a step or two, studying his face.

"Just what does that mean?" she demanded. It was more hostility than fear that crept into her narrowed eyes.

"It means that I know, now, just what you are," cried her husband, flinging aside the wet bath-towel.

"And what enlightened you?" she asked, her voice slightly shrill with scorn.

"*You* have," he shouted. His hands were shaking and an uncontrollable twitching took possession of the muscles of his shoulders. The woman in the thin night-dress put down the tooth-brush and the tube of dentifrice she had been holding in her fingers. Then she stepped back a pace or two, as though to command a better view of him.

"Are you still drunk?" she asked, sweeping him with her stare of disgust.

"No, thank God, I've at last got my senses," he passionately averred. "Oh, you liar! You liar!"

He thought, for a moment, that her retreat towards the door had been prompted by fear. But she stopped short, with her shoulders drawn up.

"It makes me sick to look at you," he cried, now in the full sweep of the passion which he could no longer withhold. But as he repeated that cry she advanced slowly towards him. Her face was white, like paper. The pupils of her eyes were enlarged, making them look almost black. Her movements were tauntingly slow and deliberate. But her breathing was quick.

"Keep out of here!" he cried, not so much as a warning that she should remain beyond the radius of his rage but more because it was the only ground, at the moment, on which he could confront her with opposition. Yet he knew he was no longer master of his own movements, and he was afraid of himself. He even shrank back, as though there were still deliverance in distance. Yet she followed him step by step, with her face out-thrust and the challenge of unutterable hate in her eyes.

"You steel-puddler!" she gasped out. "You common cur! You coward! Oh, you coward!"

"Keep out o' here!" he repeated, thickly, foolishly. And as she stood with her face thrust against his he flung

out at her the one word he knew would hurt her most, the word that had floated so revoltingly up to his ears the first day he had ever seen her.

That word electrified her into sudden and feline movement. She struck at his face, foolishly, frenziedly, as he made a last effort to push her away from him, to get her out through the door before the last of his reason slipped away from him. But she resisted him, relapsing blindly to the plane of blind force, clawing at his bare shoulders, scratching with her hooked finger-nails until the blood showed on the white flesh.

That seemed to madden him. He caught her suddenly by the throat, sending her swaying and staggering back. But she clung to him, clawed at him, panting and sobbing with the fury of her anger. "You coward," she blubbered, loose-lipped, as she fought against him, resisted him to the utmost.

But he was too strong for her. Even as he held her by the firm column of the neck some forlorn ghost of chivalry forbade him to strike her. All his instincts were against striking her. It was not what white men did. Yet he felt a great hunger to hurt that body of hers, the grim demand to inflict suffering on it. Repressed impulses clamoured for liberation, aborted intentions and thwarted desires re-arose on the stirred pool of his passion. No; he must not strike her. Yet he must hurt her; he must hurt her, to make up for the past.

He lifted her bodily and twisted her back over the lip of the enamel bath-tub, in an effort to fling her from him. But she was lithe, lithe as a cat. As he forced her down, vaguely wondering if the strain would break her back, she tried to set her teeth in the firm white flesh of his shoulder. That sudden pain brought a reaction that was unwilled and unconscious. He imprisoned her arms and held her upright, threshing her from side to side, shaking her as a terrier shakes a rag. Then her struggles suddenly ceased.

For a moment he thought that she was unconscious. But her eyes were open, he saw, and her body was still twitching. She stared up at him, apparently without seeing him, limp, passive, inert, no longer ready to oppose him, appearing willing to endure his blows, as though some black joy lurked in the pain he had been inflicting upon her, a stare of stupid and voluptuous content on her unclean face.

He dropped her at that, in shame, in disgust, in sudden humiliation. She balanced along the edge of the tub for a moment, hung there, and then slid limply down into the porcelain bath, lying there full length, face up, almost as though she lay in her coffin.

He stood staring down at her. He could see the short sobs that tore her bosom, where the thin *crêpe-de-Chine* had been mauled away.

He turned and staggered out through the door, making his way blindly towards one of the studio windows. There he awakened, for the first time, to the fact that he was sobbing aloud. He was sobbing and gasping with unutterable self-shame. He had ill-treated a woman, had beaten and abused her. He had reached the lowest, the lowest depths beyond which there was nothing, nothing in any way human. He had at last touched bottom.

Wave after wave of remorse welled through him, melting him into a new-born and unendurable storm of pity. He went back to the bathroom. He stooped over the tub, where she still lay, white as the porcelain beside her. He slipped one hand under her shoulder, and another under her softly yielding hips. Then he lifted her up. He felt her weight, cool and limp and pliant, against his body. In that way he carried her to the bed and placed her on it, very carefully, finding a wordless relief in even that small service. Then he moistened a towel with warm water, and wiped the saliva and froth from her face, and adjusted sheet and blanket and coverlet over the bruised body, as languid now as a sleepy child's.

He returned to the bath-room, rubbed alum on his scratched shoulders, drenched his throbbing head in cold water, and put on the rest of his clothes. Then he caught up his hat and strode from the room.

He escaped to the street, oppressed by the whiteness of the sunlight, vaguely afraid to look men and women in the face, burning to walk off the poisons which were souring his body, dumbly longing for the lapse of time, time which alone could heal such deep and ugly lacerations of the spirit.

Yet time, he told himself, could not even do this. The wound would always be there, for it was a wound in life itself. It was too profoundly involved with the past to be escapable.

Hour after hour he walked unrecognized streets, hoping for the relief of weariness. But it was beyond physical effort to bring the anaesthesia that he craved. When he found himself back on Broadway, before one of those gaily façaded restaurants which are known to the Rialto as "lobster-palaces," he turned in through the highly ornamented doorway, remembering that many a man, before this, had drowned his sorrows in drink.

So he drank, determinedly, joylessly, silently. He drank until memory was dulled, until co-ordination became a matter of difficulty, until a veil swung between him and the few impersonally curious figures scattered about that place of nocturnal revelry. He sat there for what seemed a long time. He sat there impervious to the swelling tide which came in with the dinner hour, impassive to their arrival and to their departure.

It was Pannie Atwill, adventuring four hours later into what was a familiar haunt to her, who stopped before his table and stared down at him. He sat, sodden and inarticulate, unable to reply to her careless-noted greeting. The smile went out of her face as she sat down beside him.

"Say, kiddo, aren't you turnin' this trick a little too often for a short-horn?" she inquired, with obvious concern. Then, after a moment or two of deep thought, she called a waiter, ordered a taxi-cab, and supported Storrow's one arm while the waiter supported the other as they made their way to the open.

No word or movement of protest came from Storrow as she carried him to her rooms, piloted his all but helpless body up a flight of stairs and permitted him to collapse neatly and contentedly across the bed towards which she had ushered him. Then she promptly turned him over, straightened him out, and unlaced his shoes. Before she came to a stop she had taken off most of his outer clothing. Then, after covering him up and tucking him in, she produced aromatic spirits of ammonia and mixed a glassful of bromo-seltzer, each of which he in turn declined to swallow.

"I guess dreamland's the drug you're lookin' for," she sagaciously observed, as she adjusted his comatose head to the pillow.

She sat watching him, with an oddly impersonal and half satyric light in her eyes. Yet her movements, as she wrung out a towel and laid it across his feverish forehead, were touched with a solicitude that was almost maternal. As he continued to sleep, she took off her own shoes and loosened her clothing, making herself as comfortable as she could in the undulatory Morris-chair beside the bed. She looked at her watch, smoked a cigarette, and waited. Finally her head drooped forward, and she fell asleep.

It was almost morning when she awakened.

"Some night!" she murmured as she inspected the still sleeping figure on her bed and fell to massaging her neck, which suspension over a chair-back had left with a crick. Then she went to the telephone and called up Storrow's wife.

"Say, Torrie, I've got that man o' yours here," she explained over the wire. "I got him here, soused to the gills!"

Storrow, roused from his lethargy by the advent of Torrie half an hour later, preferred to keep the lids closed over his still burning eyes. Even through the fumes that clouded his brain he was conscious of an immeasurable shame. He was ashamed of his helplessness, of what he remembered of the past, of his unclean and dishevelled clothing, of the sour and shaking body which he was still unable to control.

"I must get him back," he heard Torrie's voice say. She spoke quietly, almost resignedly. She stood close to him, and yet her voice seemed to come from a great distance. She was stooping to pick his coat and vest from the floor when a light tap sounded on the door.

"That's only Mattie," explained Storrow's wife to the owner of the room, in little more than a whisper.

"Why's Mattie breezin' round so early?" asked Pannie Atwill.

"I asked her to," was Torrie's low-toned retort, followed by an inaudible conference between the three of them.

"What'n the name o' Gawd ever marked your neck up that way?" suddenly demanded the voice of Mattie Crowder.

Torrie remained silent for a moment or two.

"*He did!*" she finally said, in a dead voice.

Mattie breathed a half-whistled note of surprise.

"Say, Torrie, that neck-stab old Modrynski handed you a couple o' years ago ain't got nothin' on *this!*"

"Hush!" said Torrie, with a quick glance towards the bed.

It was Pannie's voice that broke the silence. "This kind o' takes me back to my plumber-boy. But bein' man-handled that way, Dearie, sure otta be great f'r your Art!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

SORROW lay in bed, unable to sleep. He lay painfully awake, staring out through the open window at a star which hung in the sky, slightly above the black ramparts of the house-roofs towering as gloomily above him as the walls of a gaol-yard. He went back over his life, page by page, with that impersonal detachment which comes only to the wakeful after midnight. And as he lay there, deliberately and laboriously balancing up the over-complicated ledger of existence, it struck him as odd that the star at which he stared should hang so serene in the midst of a sky equally serene, while he himself remained so humanly fevered and troubled in spirit. Night, he remembered, had once been able to bring him peace. Sleep, until he came to that great city of unrest, had never seemed reluctant to refill the lowered reservoirs of vitality. Always, before that, he had found the hours of darkness ready to dedicate themselves to the quiet restoration of mind and body, no matter whether his pillow had been a pine-bough or a folded Hudson-Bay blanket or even the thwart of a Rice-Lake canoe. Always the sigh of the wind in tree-tops or the lap of water on pebbly shores had lulled him away from any distractions that crowded his day.

But now, with the nocturnal hum of the city in his ears, he found no art to relax the over-tensioned bow. The fault, he knew, lay in his own heart, sour with disgust, heavy with defeat, tortured with the thought that he had made a failure of life. Step by step he recalled his earlier hopes and aspirations, his older and cleaner ways of life, his more eager and lighthearted outlook on

the world. He reviewed his first advent to the city, his meeting with Torrie, his surrender to the impulses of the body, his quixotic marriage, his aborted attempts at revolt against an environment which he had only half-recognized as degrading, his mis-steps and mistakes, and his entrance into that culminating consciousness of betrayal which now left him as poignantly alone as though he stood the last man on the last ice-floe of a planet lost in space.

A sense of the strangeness of earthly things returned to him, as he lay there as rigid as the blade of a sword, in remembering the gulfs which now yawned between him and the quietly breathing body reposing with such ironic intimacy on the same bed with him. He was no longer swayed by that earlier unreasoning passion to inflict injury on it, to impose suffering on what had brought suffering to him. His feelings had merged into something more passive, a vague and perplexed indifferency, a desire for silence and the obliterating dust of time, a hunger for even the hope of quietness and remoteness where the healing forces of life might in some devious way reassert themselves.

He had sunk low, he remembered, and had surrendered much; but he had not altogether given up the hope of hope. Somewhere, in the unsleeping core of his being, there was the trampled spark which could not and should not go out. If that went, all indeed was lost. In some way and by some means, at whatever cost, he must recover his grip on life. He must go back to the beginning of things, grope through the fog, struggle on until he once more reached solid and decipherable ground. Somewhere in the world there was a great serenity which was being denied him. He was meant to be a part of that serenity, above the harrying disorder and distractions of life. And above that blind welter, he felt, must dwell some far-off purpose, some larger order which he was as yet unable to see in perspective, some wider scheme of

things in which even earthly passion might find its reason and its redemption.

Storrow felt it to be there, even as he realized that it lay beyond his reach. And his secondary sense of frustration brought with it a new and deeper misery. It left him apparently mocked at by the very God on whom he stood unable to call for help. Yet as he lay there, in his silent conflict of soul, he prayed without knowing that he was praying. He was unconscious of prayer, since no answer came to those frantic and only half-articulate appeals to the unknown. He was conscious only of his suffering, of a sleepless tension that seemed unendurable, of a feeling of being prematurely old and exhausted. The only tatter of hope that remained with him lay in the memory of that unobliterated spark lost somewhere in the trodden husks of his past, the spark in which he still forlornly refused to relinquish belief. It prompted him to remember, as he lay there in his misery waiting for the morning, that even as the ache would in time go out of the body which had been so ill-used, so the subtler ache would in time pass away from the spirit which no longer seemed his to control.

Yet before he could know that restoration, he felt, he would have to know quietness for thought and elbow-room for reverie. He must have breathing-space for both body and soul. He must get away: that was something which his inalienable passion for the open had imposed upon him. There was no longer any doubt about the matter. To stay between those walls, in the old rut, played on by the old influences and surroundings, was out of the question. He must go.

He thought of Angelo Dellazio and his cellar studio very much as a man dying of thirst might think of a spring bubbling out of a hillside. There, he told himself, was a cave into which he might crawl with his wounds. There, he remembered, he could know the consolation of temporary nonentity, of submerging himself unremem-

bered among the unknown. And the more he thought the matter over the more fixed he became in purpose. His spirit grew quieter. He no longer dreaded the thought of the morning.

When Torrie, waking early, hurriedly slipped out of bed and began dressing, he lay with his eyes closed, preferring that she accept him as still sleeping. Yet he found it hard to control his breathing when she came to the bedside and stood over him. The knowledge that she was staring down at him brought a pang to his heart; he did not know why. He was determined, however, to betray no sign of feeling. It was not until she stooped closer, and with a movement or two that was both solicitous and tender drew the covers up about his shoulders, that feeling too strong for his control welled up in his body. His eyes were still closed, but a sort of sob burst from him, a ghost of a sob which he found himself utterly unable to repress.

"What is it, Honey?" asked Torrie, still stooping over him, with a debilitating little flutter of anxiety in her voice.

"I guess I was dreaming," he said, almost gruffly, as he made an effort to turn on his side, determined that she should not see the tears which were wet on his face. He was ashamed of his weakness. He was determined, too, that there should be no more perilous passage of words between them, though the stooping woman stood for several moments gazing down at her husband's averted head. He distinctly caught the sound of her sigh as she turned away, at last, and busied herself at the homely little duties of the kitchenette. Those tasks, for some reason, took on a tragic aspect, even in their triviality. They seemed permeated with a colouring of pathos which he could not fathom. Even the thought that she was eating that hurried breakfast alone weighed ponderously on his heart. And it was with a definite sense of relief

that he awakened to the fact that she was making herself ready for the street.

He neither moved nor opened his eyes until she had taken her departure. But, once sure that she was gone, he slipped hurriedly out of bed and just as hurriedly dressed. He gathered together the things which he felt he might need, packed them in his hand-bag, and slowly and deliberately inspected the studio. Then, with that valedictory look still in his eyes, he took up the packed hand-bag and stepped out of the room, carefully and quietly closing the door behind him.

An hour later he carried his heavy bag down the narrow stairway leading to Angelo Dellazio's cellar in Shimer Place.

"Well, I've come," he calmly announced to the plaster-powdered Italian stooping over a white-pine box in which three dozen casts of Dante's head were being packed in chopped straw.

But little more than blank incredulity showed on the face of the brown-eyed Angelo.

"I mean it," explained Storrow, putting down his bag. "And you needn't worry about my not working. I'll give you all you can handle. All I want is enough to eat and a place to sleep. That's fair, isn't it, until I show you what I can do?"

But Angelo, as he stood scratching his crisp black curls, had his doubts about it being fair enough. He studied the newcomer with much concern, and then the cast-covered cellar walls, and then the brown-tinted bust of Dante which he still held in his hand. Then he retreated to the living-quarters above-stairs and consulted with Maria, his rotund and wren-like wife, who surreptitiously inspected Storrow through a crack in the door and perceived that he was good to look upon and carried no obvious ear-marks of a refugee from justice.

So the matter was decided, then and there. Storrow

became one of that little family in Shimer Place shadowed by the mottled walls of tenements, submerging himself in that crowded corner of the East Side where even to hear his native tongue was to prove a novelty. There he proceeded to make himself phantasmally at home, entering into the work allotted to him with a preoccupied ferocity which more and more tended to perplex the mild-eyed Angelo. There, down the narrow canyon of a side-street a-flutter with multi-coloured bedding and washings, a joyous and noisy side-street that seemed almost Neopolitan in its colour and movement, Storrow saw Spring come to the city. He beheld the hurdy-gurdies emerge and the Bock Beer signs appear on the gilt-corniced saloon towards the water-front and the hokey-pokey barrows come out like crocuses and swart children enraptured with the strains of a *tarantella* dancing like grass-hoppers on the broken concrete. He felt the sun shine warm on the smoke-stained bricks, and noticed greens in the carts of the street-vendors, and caught a ghostly aroma of outland budding and burgeoning on the languid breeze that crept in across the East River. And down that echoing canyon, in the paling afternoons, he saw the shadows grow purple and the golden mist that hung over the city deepen to a wine-glow like the wine-glow that once hung warm over his native mountains. And if in his heart a great unhappiness lay sealed and coffined, he struggled none the less determinedly to keep the lid tight down on that casket where his lost hopes slept.

It was this which kept him so doggedly and so desperately close to his work. Angelo saw to it that he was well supplied with modelling clay and wax. And the new-found maker of images, freed from all restraints, contemptuous of criticism, careless of results, played with his lost art. He let his fancy laugh, lightly and cynically, into the ha'penny forms that were demanded of him. He learned quickly enough from Angelo the limit-

ations in form and line imposed upon him, the necessity for that modified pornography which carried its appeal to modified intelligence. Yet what he modelled was something more than the *bijoutry* whose natural haven was the beer-parlour and the barber-shop wall. If he approached his work with a cynical and careless hand he also brought to it the airiness born of indifferency. And day by day he built up his models until there came into being that small array of figures which brought joy to the heart of Angelo and Maria and were destined later on to run like a nettle-rash across the country. His first figure, *The Bather,* was an obvious imitation of Bouguereau, with the Dellazio influence too much to the front. But his second figure, *The Diver,* caught at first-hand from a naked urchin on the string-piece of an East River wharf-end, had in it the unsuppressed spirit of youth and vitality, made doubly effective after the inspired Angelo hit on the expedient of dipping the finished cast in a stain of copper-brown. Then Storrow turned to animals, essaying a figure or two which gave him much personal satisfaction but eventually confirmed Angelo's prediction that they would never sell like a nude. So he went back to the nudes, turning them out with a blithe bitterness of heart born of the memory that he was prostituting a gift which had once seemed sacred to him. In this spirit, half of mockery, half of shamelessness, he created that poignant little study known to the world as *The Tired Model,* the crouching and lean-ribbed figure, too pensively youthful and human ever to offend by its nakedness, which was later to smile down from half a million book-shelves and plate-rails and what-nots. And Angelo, seeing that the work was good, prepared his moulds and mixed his plaster and tinted the finished casts, persuaded that a new era was overtaking his business.

This promise of trebled trade seemed in no way to interest Storrow. He worked and lived like a man in a

dream. He ate meals of spaghetti and sour wine, with a braised pullet on Sundays. He sat trance-like at a table where half a dozen excited Sicilians argued frenziedly and endlessly as to condiments and Caruso and lemon-shipments from Palermo. He ate unknown dishes savoury with garlic, and smoked rat-tail stogies handed forth by unknown companions. For a holiday he occasionally went with Angelo and a comrade Neopolitan in an extremely dirty motor-launch down the Bay, where they fished for eels and Lafayettes, kicking home sunburned and tired with the incoming tide. Once, too, he joined his new friends in an excursion to Coney Island, where he moved about with constraint and finally purchased from a dispenser of holiday souvenirs a small basket of woven sweet-grass. From the aromatic fibres of this basket he was able to extract a quick but keen consolation, for the heavy fragrance of sweet-grass had never failed to carry him back, at a bound, to the roads and hill-sides of his native province. But all the time, during that outing, he watched Midway and street-crowd and bathing-beaches with apprehension, secretly dreading that some friend from his old world might chance to confront him with startled and accusatory eyes.

That emissary from his old world, in fact, came to him much more abruptly and bewilderingly than he had counted on. He came a week later, in the form of Modrynski himself, who made his way creakingly and wheezingly down Dellazio's narrow stairway and confronted Storrow as the latter stood at the iron sink washing up after his morning's work.

"I salute you, sir," said Modrynski with his stately yet half satyric bow. And Storrow, without speaking, stood staring at his enemy of other days. It seemed a very long time ago, since they had faced each other.

"And I must further inquire," continued Modrynski as he took a parcel wrapped in tissue-paper from under his caped coat, "if this happens to be your work?"

Storrow saw the tremulous old fingers tear away the folds of tissue-paper, revealing one of Angelo's freshly minted casts of *The Tired Model.*

"It is," acknowledged Storrow.

"I thought so," said the older man, moving his head slowly from side to side, for all the world like a Polar bear in a zoo-cage. "And to run down the perpetrator of that enormity, sir, has taken three whole days of my time!"

"Then why bother about it?" demanded Storrow, with imperfectly masked antagonism. He was troubled, at the moment, with none too happy memories of earlier comments on his art work.

"Why bother about it?" repeated Modrynski, undisturbed by the other's hostility. "Because behind all its badness, my dear young misanthrope, behind all its misplacing of muscles and false marshalling of masses, is enough of the breath of life to compel a man who has grown old in the search of beauty to respect its creator." He turned, for the first time, and stared slowly about the crowded and cast-littered chamber. "But what, in the name of God, are you doing in a catacomb like this?"

"I'm living my own life," averred Storrow, meeting the older man's sunken and ochre-framed eye. Still again, and even through the fogs of hostility, he could detect the beauty of that unageing eye, full-coloured and deep and limpid in the midst of the yellowed and wrinkled face.

"You mean *burying* your life," countered Modrynski, with yet another stare about the room. "And the interring of that which is still alive impresses me as not only a calamity, but as a crime," he added with slow deliberation, as he seated himself on one of Angelo's cases of plaster images.

"It's at least my own," retorted Storrow, plainly with no wish to prolong the interview. But Modrynski was not to be shaken off.

"Not altogether," he meditatively reminded the other man. Then he stood up again. "There's Torrie, you know. And I feel, sir, that you have not been quite fair to her."

It was a full moment before Storrow spoke again.

"I'll be obliged if you'll not discuss my wife," he finally declared.

Again the eyes of the two men met. It was only the face of the older man that carried any touch of gentleness.

"But I'm afraid we are compelled to discuss her," contended Modrynski, the slight foreign intonation of his voice seeming to give a touch of impersonality to a statement still essentially personal. "And Torrie is a girl very dear to my heart."

"I've had considerable evidence of that," was Storrow's quick and embittered retort.

The deep-set eyes gazed unwaveringly out of the faded old face, as meditative and melancholy as an eagle's.

"I am complimented by your jealousy, my lad, even while I am compelled to acknowledge that it is unjust," Modrynski quietly replied. "In two years I shall be seventy. I am an old man. And time, you must remember, brings its immunities. You are young, and your blood is hot — and for that I envy you. But I who am old have learned to know that no problem is solved by running away from it."

"I've been conscious of no particular problem confronting me," contended the younger man.

"But there *is* a problem. I know that, now, as I see the unhappiness in your face. Women, of course, should be accidents, and only accidents, in the life of the true artist. But that is something we keep failing to remember. We also sometimes fail to remember that it is the woman of beauty and warmer blood, the woman of keen feeling and quick impulses, who first affects and inflames us. That woman's life must be kept full. It is the rich

soil that cannot lie fallow or barren. It must be a garden of quiet rapture, or a riot of weeds. And if we fail to meet her demands and keep full her life, we must not be surprised if she is driven to seek consolation from other sources."

"What are you driving at?" was Storrow's brusk demand.

"I am driving at nothing," Modrynski responded with carefully maintained deliberateness. "I am merely attempting to point out to you that at a time like this your place is at your wife's side."

Storrow swung about, trying to dissemble the creeping chill in his blood by a show of anger.

"There seem to be a number of persons actively nursing the same conviction," was his almost passionate retort.

"Precisely," coldly admitted the older man. "And that is what has given me the courage to search you out and suggest to you the possibility of disputing their claim."

"But I have no intention of disputing their claim," cried the other.

Modrynski, still studying the younger man's face, slowly buttoned up the voluminous caped overcoat.

"All such final decisions must, of course, remain with you. But having done what I conceived to be my duty, I can now bid you good-morning, sir, and take my departure."

Yet in taking his departure, with creaking steps and a pathetic effort at *bravado* in the brokenly hummed air from *"Rigoletto,"* Modrynski took away with him the last of Storrow's laboriously fabricated peace of mind. It was like the tearing open of a wound but half healed. It brought the thought of his wife torturingly back to him. It reminded him that his immersion in a trivial slum-cellar occupation was nothing more than an armistice, an interregnum of false tranquillity, a burrowing of

the head of misery beneath the sands of self-deception. Yet he fought against remembrance, just as he fought against the recurring picture of Torrie, of Torrie as a latter-day Penelope without either the fortitude or the distaff of her old-world sister. He struggled to ambuscade himself behind a barrier of frantically engineered activities, persuading Angelo to give him an upstairs room where the light would permit him to work directly from models, arguing that he must attempt figures in life size, must try for something bigger and better than plaster cupids and coffee-tinted busts of Columbus.

So Angelo, compliant but perplexed, brought framework and chicken wire and wax and plaster for sketch models and a screen behind which swarthy young women not averse to posing *pour l'ensemble* might decently disrobe. And Storrow worked with a fever in his fingers almost as mad as the fever in his blood. But the results, as a whole, were disappointing. They were foreordained to be such. For Art, Storrow wistfully remembered, was something more than an antipyretic, something beyond a mere cooling immersion for overfevered minds and bodies. In thinking too much about forgetting the past, he forgot that over-exacting mistress who must demand all or nothing. His accumulating consciousness of defeat, too, was complicated with a keen yet indeterminate longing, an ache which, incongruous as it seemed, established itself as something much more physical than it was mental. To keep his mind on his work was out of the question. The nudity of even a professional model became repugnant to him. It brought back memories that were over-disturbing. And he slowly awakened to the fact that a change of some sort was inevitable, though he stood unable to apprehend even the nature of that change.

In his restlessness, one night, he accompanied Angelo and Maria to a diminutive Italian theatre in Varick

Place. It was little more than a beer-hall with "*Entrata Libera*" inscribed above its soiled and dingy entrance, but on that night, Angelo fierily protested, a compatriot of his named Zacconi was to sing, an artist of the first water, a genius with a voice of gold, who should have been holding out at the *San Carlo* and *La Scala,* but for an unfortunate love-affair complicated with a stilettoed rival and a somewhat peremptory flight to South America.

The artist of the first water, in that hot and crowded little hall where the audience thumped its approval with beer-mugs on table-tops and the air was heavy with garlic and tobacco, proved to be a fat and attitudinizing tenor whose voice of gold altogether failed to impress the morose-eyed Storrow. He was effecting an early escape, in fact, when he was arrested by a second singer who stepped out on the narrow stage, a girl in a short pink skirt and little else, a tired-eyed girl with a Greek profile and a heavily rouged and powdered face. He dropped into an empty chair as she sang Monzzocci's *E Piscatori.* It appealed to him in a way which he could not fathom, and he forgot the garlic and tobacco and the sawdust on the floor. It took him back to other days, to the spring of life, to the time when he too could be as lighthearted as the young Italian fruit-vendor and his downy-cheeked sweetheart across the aisle from him. Then the girl on the stage was joined by the Zacconi of the golden voice, and together they sang a French duet, a suggestive and *risque* song in which the rotund tenor pressed the tired-eyed girl in the short pink skirt to his bosom. And for the second time Storrow was about to make his escape in disgust, when he was pushed quietly back into his chair by a thin white hand.

When he looked up he beheld Pannie Atwill demurely seating herself at the other side of his scarred and mottled little table.

"Hello, you mutt!" she coolly murmured, unedging the bluntness of that salutation by the softness of her smile.

"Hello," was Storrow's startled and altogether inadequate reply, as he followed Pannie's stare about to the door at the back of the hall.

Towards that portal she nodded a diffident and explanatory head.

"I just sent that Pittsburg white-goods buyer I was showin' the sights to off to dig me up a dozen American Beauties or the night was ended. Which same ought 'o keep him busy sloothin' out a flower-shop for the next half-hour or so. Where're you livin' now?"

"I don't pretend to be living," was Storrow's noncommittal retort.

"Certainly not like a white man," asserted Pannie, with a suddenly sobered face.

"Just what do you mean by that?" demanded the other, touched with wonder at the memory of how destiny had interwoven his career with this painted and pert-eyed child of the chorus.

"I mean anything you want to make it mean," was her reply. "But if you're nursin' any doubts as to what I'm drivin' at I'll blink the bromide by explainin' that you don't impress me as treatin' Torrie Throssel as I'd expect a white man to treat her." She smiled, almost wearily at his quick movement of protest. "Oh, no; you can't flag me off the landscape that light and airy way, at least not until I spill a little of the chin-goods I've been gatherin' up for you. I've been in on this bonehead play from the first, and I'm entitled to speak a few kind words, now I've collared the chance."

"Words, Pannie, won't do the slightest good in the world," Storrow announced to her, out of a sudden vast weariness of soul which seemed too profound to plumb. And Pannie, for a moment, sat regarding him with studious and contemplative eyes.

"You don't strike me as lookin' any too scrumptious," she impersonally remarked.

"Perhaps I'm not feeling that way," he countered.

"And what's the answer?" she pertly demanded.

"That's something it would be only a waste of time to discuss," he told her.

"I can't see that hidin' away from it has helped much," she coolly amended. It was not the flash of contempt from her eyes that hurt him. What wounded him deepest was her ill-concealed kindliness of intent. And at that particular time he was asking for neither pity nor help.

"Debating about it would have the same drawback," he asserted in self-defence.

She looked him up and down, appraisingly.

"Well, you can at least wise me up on one thing: Do you intend to take the full count?"

He had to acknowledge his failure to understand what she meant.

"When a game gink goes to the mat," she said by way of explanation, "he sweats blood to get up on his feet again b'fore they count him out, for good. When he lays down and takes it like a dead man, they say he's taken the count. Have *you?*"

That uncouth hand, insinuating itself about the roots of his soul, was anything but a welcome intrusion to Storrow. But he stood without the power to repel it.

"Let me tell you something straight," went on his calm-eyed tormentor. "I know Torrie about as well as anybody on Gawd's green earth. She's alive and warm-blooded and eager f'r the joy o' livin'. She never was a dead one. If the right man doesn't fill her life, there's goin' to be others to step in and turn the trick. But it's got 'o be filled; it's got 'o! And just now there's a guy or two breakin' their necks to persuade her you've thrown her down, for good. She doesn't want to believe 'em. She's tryin' not to believe 'em. But

women are women, son, and there's a time when they get tired o' waitin' for the right man to say the right word. And if you ain't got the answer she's waitin' for about your person, somebody else is goin' to beat you to it!"

"Somebody else, I'm afraid, has already beaten me to it," he deliberately announced. He tried to speak calmly, but it disturbed him more than he imagined to find Pannie Atwill presenting to him a *réchauffé* of the same dish which Modrynski had already held out to him.

"Do you know what's the matter with you?" Pannie was demanding, with a sudden show of scorn. "The trouble with you is that you ain't old enough to know how to handle a woman. Old Dave was right; a guy's got 'o pass forty before he finds out how to treat 'em right! All you young cubs think about is yourself, and your own feelin's, and your own sore thumbs. You're too wrapt up in what you want, to bother much about the woman, and whether you're makin' her happy or not. You're frettin' too much about what you're gettin' out of it to stop and inquire if there's anything big or fine in the way you're treatin' the other party!"

On the narrow stage at the far end of the smoke-filled room the girl in the short pink skirt was singing the Musetta Waltz from *Boheme*. Storrow heard it and yet failed to hear it, for he sat there beside the grave of his lost hopes, sabering himself with the self-questionings of the unhappy, demanding of himself if indeed it could be true that much of the fault could lay with him, forlornly inquiring if there were not still some path which might lead him back, back to the older and happier days, back to some St. Marten's Summer of contentment with even less of rapture and more of wisdom in it. Then came an abysmal sense of loneliness, sweeping over him black wave by wave, leaving him with a desolating consciousness of estrangement from the things after which he had once hungered.

"But I can't find any reason for treating the other party, as you express it, in any other way," he finally asserted, in his inadequate gesture of self-defence.

"Then what're you goin' to do about it?" demanded the girl on the other side of the table.

"About what?" parried Storrow.

"About your wife and family," said Pannie, with great deliberation.

"My wife and family?" repeated Storrow as his gaze came to rest on Pannie's rouged face. The interrogative blankness of his eyes seemed to puzzle her for a moment or two.

"You ain't tryin' to tell me," she asked as she leaned impressively forward across the table, "that you haven't been hep to what's happened?"

"Hep to what's happened?" he still repeated, as their glances locked.

"You knew Torrie was caught?" demanded Pannie, with narrowed and accusatory eyes.

"Caught? What do you mean by caught?" asked the other. His bland ignorance of the idiom of her world seemed to exasperate Pannie.

"Do you mean to say," she slowly intoned, "that you didn't know Torrie was going to have a baby? That in five or six months you'd be havin' something to walk the floor with?"

Slowly the colour ebbed out of Storrow's face. He sat for a full minute without moving, with his unseeing eyes on the face of the girl who abstractedly took a powder-paper from her silver vanity-case and with it dusted her *retroussé* young nose.

"That isn't true?" he murmured, with a look that was half horror and half incredulity still in his stricken eyes.

Pannie snapped shut her vanity-case.

"Of course it's true," she said as she leaned in over the table again. "And while I've got the chance I want

to plant one bee in your bonnet. If you intend to play ostrich after you've brought this on Torrie, you're yellower than any real man I ever knew. And that's about all for tonight, Capt'n Kidd, for I see my Pittsburg gink over there with what looks like a coffin under his arm, and I guess we'll be ramblin' on to where the lights are white!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

STORROW, after a night of troubled thought, knew that he would have to go back to Torrie. He was reluctant to acknowledge it, even to himself. Yet he began to realize that it would be useless to combat further those combined currents of impulse and obligation carrying him back to the older order of things. He was the prey of feelings too powerful for his own will. And he was tired of passivity, tired, too, of the tedium of suspended action.

But he stood, as yet, convinced of nothing, of nothing, at least, beyond the knowledge that the present situation had become unendurable. He could not stay on with Angelo. That was out of the question. And he could not go back to the old order without beholding there vast and calamitous changes. There was, in fact, no such thing as the old order. Yet he must go back to what was left of it. It would be still another compromise imposed upon him by life. But it was a compromise for the sake of survival — and to survive was still a final and sullen instinct with him. The trampled spark, he told himself, must not go entirely out. . . .

It was not until his taxi-cab swung from Lexington Avenue into Twenty-Fourth Street that he thought primarily of Torrie and her predicament. That brought to him a less ponderable sense of disturbance, an indeterminate feeling of guilt touched with pity, a shadowy consciousness of incompetence shot through with the twilight hope of vague renewals, a hunger to make amends and reconstruct what was threatening to fall into ruins. There was the need now for some newer outlook. Fate had reached out its iron hand and linked him up with

the chain of life. A child was to be born to him, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.

Storrow stopped short. He could not even be sure of that. Deception, he remembered, could only too easily extend to those over-vulnerable frontiers. And he found himself groping with frantic misery back into the immediate past, measuring the months and weeks, reviving and reviewing the days which aligned themselves before him as the days of peril. Yet he emerged from that feverish inspection thinly fortified, persuaded that his suspicions were groundless, must be groundless. His thoughts, in fact, reverted to certain vivid-memoried scenes of Torrie lying passive and heavy-lidded in his arms. Once she had even rested there sobbing, apparently without rhyme or reason. But it was only now that he realized they had not been free agents adventuring along the paths of desire. They had been the toys of Nature warping and bending them to her implacable demands, playing on them for her own subterranean and dissembled ends. And as he climbed the gloomy old stairs that led back to his studio he found it momentarily impossible to think of Torrie as his enemy and his betrayer. He thought of her more as a straw blown in the wind, as something hunted and harried down the aisles of destiny, as something so fragile that it stood touched with pathos, as something to be pitied.

His heart was beating fast as he took out his pass-key and opened the door. For that threshold, he felt, was the Rubicon of his life. Yet about his movements as he closed the door behind him was an aspect of deliberation, of judicial quietness, strangely at variance with the tumult in his quick-pounding heart.

The first thing he saw was Torrie. He saw her seated in the faded and familiar green-backed chair, with the milky softness of her face and throat accentuated by the darkness of her tumbled hair. She was leaning forward, relaxed, with her knees apart, in the midst of darning a

pair of black silk stockings. Down the leg of one stocking Storrow could see her drop the broken door-knob which she used for such purposes. He could see her work this knob into the toe of the stocking, and then ply her needle across the white dimple of glazed porcelain that showed through the worn silk.

She looked up, startled by his movement as he stepped forward into the room. Then in almost the same instant her eyes fell again to the stocking in her hand. She stared down at it, as though intent on her work, but the hand that held the threaded needle remained motionless.

Storrow felt an iron band tighten about his heart, tighten until it seemed to force a cry from his throat. He flung himself down on the floor in front of her and buried his face in the skirt that hung loose between her relaxed knees. He did not know why he was doing it, but he found himself kneeling there shaken with sobs. No word passed between them. But a hand was placed first on the bony shoulders so racked with their inarticulate anguish and then lifted to the bowed head. She stroked his hair, pityingly, almost maternally. It was not until he grew quieter that she spoke.

"It's all right, Honey," she said in a strangled voice. "It's all right," she kept repeating, as though speaking to a child.

When he looked up, at last, he found her own face streaked with tears, even though no spasm of remorse had shaken her body.

"No, no; it's all wrong," he said as he lowered his head and moved it slowly from side to side. He was ashamed now of his tears, and he did his best to control them. Then he caught at her hand, and clung to it, childishly, as though he were in need of sustenance.

"I've come back," he said, still without looking at her.

"I knew you would," she quietly responded.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

NOTHING in the life of man, Storrow was beginning to learn, was either absolute or permanent. Hope itself came to him shadowed with a great Perhaps, triumph arrived tinged with defeat, conquest inextricably tangled up with subjugation. Even happiness, at its highest pitch, was not without an undertone of regret, and love itself too often took on a colouring of pain, just as humour, uncouth and incongruous, could unexpectedly return to rob the deepest grief of its dignity.

Pliant as Storrow tried to leave himself during the ensuing days of readjustment, there were moods and moments when he was tempted to nurse the suspicion that the whole thing was a mockery, a studiously sustained pretence. Something, he felt, was wanting, even though that deficiency remained undefined. Yet against this feeling he fought both actively and stubbornly, knowing that since he had made his bed he must lie in it. He must make the best of things. He no longer had any choice in the matter. He found himself thrust into a forlorn campaign of reconstruction in which he was desperately resolved not to fail.

He was helped in this resolution by his newer attitude towards Torrie. In that attitude was a quiet tenderness, a tendency to be more deliberate in his movements, an autumnal wistfulness in his regard for her, a permutation of midsummer passion into the cooler and thinner sunlight of November. This vague desire for tranquillity, for that peace in which the currents of renewal flow

freest, left him reluctant to talk about the immediate past and the situation which had led to his disappearance. To discuss that still seemed too much like the reopening of wounds not yet entirely healed. But it was impossible, on the other hand, to keep entirely out of the past, just as it was impossible to foretell into what paths the idlest of talk might venture.

"I suppose you know," Torrie said to him one morning, nearly a week after his return, "how well your book's been going? And the page the *Sunday Herald* had about your adventures in the Barren Grounds?"

Storrow, in acknowledging that he had heard nothing of this, could not repress a pang of regret that his native land, that his old woodland life, that the sun-clad hills of his youth, seemed now such worlds and worlds away from him.

"Chester Hardy says that book is apt to bring you in more money than you imagine," Torrie continued.

The mention of Hardy's name, as he explained that he wasn't much interested in money matters, both disturbed and depressed him.

"But you'll have to be, before very long," announced Torrie as her gaze met his. She seemed surprised by the look of embarrassment in his eyes. "Krassler says he wants your book for the movies," she went on in an effort to bridge a silence touched with discomfort. "He even said the company he's interested in will give you two thousand dollars for the rights."

Storrow got up from his chair.

"Then Krassler's been here?" he demanded, more sharply than he had intended.

"Yes; he drops up now and then," was the studiously indifferent reply from his wife. Then she added, as though in after-thought: "He keeps saying that I ought to be back on the stage."

Storrow did not seem to hear her.

"And how about Modrynski?" he asked, almost

harshly, as though intent on clearing the board, now that the task had been begun.

Torrie, for one brief moment, swept his face with a close and questioning glance, as though demanding of herself the real motive for those interrogations.

"I have seen him only twice," she said with a carefully maintained patience. "He says our stairs are too much for him."

"And Vibbard?"

Torrie shook her head from side to side.

"No, I haven't seen him since"— She came to a stop, apparently unwilling to recall in words a scene still too distasteful to her.

"And how about that man Eastman?" continued Storrow, intent on going to the end of his unsavoury excursion. His wife's hesitation did not escape him, ready as he stood to attribute to it a significance which could only spell anguish for his own heart.

"Donnie's been here, several times," she acknowledged, the effort with which she spoke seeming to imply that she was forcing herself to be honest with an inquisitor whose right she could still question. "He's been here, just as he's been everywhere. But I don't think he'll bother me much more."

"No, I don't think he will," averred Storrow, with a passion which he was unable to control. For the past, which was equally beyond his control, was reaching out its hands to strangle what was left of his hope.

"Owen," said Torrie, arresting him in his febrile striding back and forth. "Now that you've mentioned these men, there's something I want to say to you."

"About them?" he abruptly demanded.

"Not so much about them as about ourselves and what you said the other day about us making the best of our lives. You still want to do that, don't you?"

He stood gazing down at her, keenly conscious of the beauty which had this tragic power to wound him. He

knew, as he stared at the deep and humid eyes, at the soft and yielding contours with still so much of youth about them, at the red and almost wilful lips with the fatal dower of desire in their over-vivid curves, that she was in some way beautiful to the eye, that she stood beautiful to him and must only naturally appear beautiful before others. The thought suddenly occurred to him that if she were ugly, if she were old and faded, she might remain entirely and indisputably his own. Even before his day, he supposed, men had wished such things.

"You still want to do that, don't you?" she patiently repeated.

"Yes," he murmured, conscious of the inadequacy of his reply. But a sudden new humility had taken the gift of words away from him.

"Then what's the use of harping back on the past and making yourself miserable, and me miserable too, about what's over and done with?" she asked with her wide-eyed stare of interrogation, untroubled, apparently, by the more complex reactions which were washing him back and forth along the shores of misery.

"It's because we can't get rid of that past," he protested. "It's because those men still happen to be a factor in your life, a factor that is hateful to me!"

"But those men are fond of me, Owen. They like to be with me. They take me for what I am. They don't stop to question every word and movement from me."

"If they did, they wouldn't be there," was his embittered retort.

"There was nothing so terrible about them being where they were," she replied with more spirit. "I may have been foolish, in doing what I did. But there was nothing wrong in it all — nothing really wrong. And until you're willing to believe that, I suppose, you'll have to keep on making yourself miserable."

"There was nothing wrong?" he repeated, staring into her uplifted face. He realized, as he looked down at

her, the impossibility of mere argument on a question so fundamental. It would be like trying to discuss the Athanasian Creed with an infant. It would be as foolish as trying to talk theology with a child.

"You believe me when I say that, don't you?" she was asking him. And he wanted to believe her; above everything else he felt the need of that belief. But After-thought, the darker sister of desire, stood forever at his elbow holding him back.

"Oh, what's the good of it all?" he cried out in his despair. "What's the good?"

"That's just what I've been asking you," protested Torrie, in a tone of modified triumph. "It's the future we've got to think about now."

"The future, with everything you've done and been piled high in its lap," he none too happily amended. And she sat with knitted brow, perplexed by that accusatory cry of protest which she could not quite comprehend.

"I don't think you should blame me," she finally asserted, "for things which happened before you ever came into my life."

"But I didn't know I was coming into that sort of life," he found the cruelty to retort.

She sat staring at him, almost abstractedly.

"Yet you probably remember *how* you came into it?" she reminded him.

"Yes, I remember," he none too happily acknowledged.

"Then, if you're so afraid of my past, and if you want to keep me for yourself, as you pretend you do, why can't you take me away from all this?"

He stopped short and turned about on her. It was something he had never thought about. It was something which, as he meditated upon it, opened wider and ever wider vistas of possibility.

"Oh, Owen," she continued, after a moment's silent study of his face, "let's get away somewhere where we

can start all over again! Let's slip away somewhere where we can be by ourselves, just the two of us!"

He did not answer her, for he was thinking of the open, of roads winding ribbon-like through grey-green valleys mottled with purple shadows, of sun-bathed cliffs overlooking wide reaches of water dappled with foam, of bracken-covered islands where the partridge drummed and the call of the moose echoed out of lonely and pine-clad hinterlands.

"Isn't there any place we could go to?" she persisted, as though that thought of migration had brought a new purpose and hope to life. But Storrow did not answer her. He was remembering how other men had lived down situations even darker than his, how under new skies came new aspirations and energies.

Torrie watched him with a clouded face, more hurt than intimidated by his silence.

"What would you have done," she quietly inquired, "if Donnie Eastman himself had taken me off that way? Would you have been glad or sorry?"

"Did he intend to?" demanded her husband, arrested by some momentary flash of recklessness from her face.

"He at least wanted to. And since I'm going to be absolutely honest with you, I may as well tell you so."

"And just what was his plan for running away with another man's wife?" asked Storrow.

"I don't think it quite reached the planning stage. But he said the *Nautilaka* was a sea-going boat — that's the yacht he chartered a little over two years ago. He said we could go down to Havana, and then slide around into the Gulf, or even slip across to Europe by the southern route. He meant it. He really wanted to. And I don't suppose Donnie ever really wanted anything in his life without being able to get it, at some time or other."

She stopped for a moment, arrested by the gasp of humiliation from her husband's puckered lips. And she

smiled wintrily, as though able to garner some scattering seed of triumph from his unhappiness.

"I know it hurts, to hear me say things like that," she calmly acknowledged. "But it shows you what a girl who's left alone in a city like this has to face."

"You mean the type of girl that fops like that can buy," he angrily interjected.

"No," she meditatively replied, "it's not the kind they can buy that they really want. It's the kind they can't quite reach that they fret and worry over and let everything go smash just to get." She looked up with an almost child-like curiosity in her wide-set eyes. "And I've been wondering just what you'd have done if Donnie Eastman *had* carried me off."

"I'd have killed him," cried Storrow, with a vehemence which sounded startling even to his own ears.

"Then you *do* care, after all," was Torrie's almost exultant proclamation. "You do! You do! You must!"

He stared at her, unable to comprehend the perverse and phantasmal consolation which she was hugging to her breast. It impressed him as a theatricality extended into a grim debate in which were involved all the darker issues of life. And he bewildered her by shrinking back when she reached out a hand to him. Yet the nature of his question, when he spoke next, was even more bewildering to her.

"Would you be willing to go up to Canada?"

It was only for a moment, however, that the deliberate and judicial tone of that demand chilled her.

"I'd go anywhere, anywhere with you," was her answer. And then she added, as though in afterthought: "But why to Canada?"

He told her of the old Amasa Kirkner fruit-farm which had become his at the time of Augusta Kirkner's death. He described it as best he could, from the time-distorted memories of childhood. She sat, relaxed and

ruminative, as he explained that the old red-brick colonial house in the midst of its pine-grove would be lonely, and fallen into neglect, but that around them they would have orchard-lands and clover-fields and coppices filled with mourning-doves. As she leaned back listening to him, with violet shadows under her eyes, she even sighed audibly in the midst of her languid vizualization of the scene which he was attempting to paint for her.

It was not until he suddenly announced that he would have to have a talk with Charlotte Kirkner about the matter that any cloud crept into Torrie's new-found horizon of contentment.

"What has she got to do with it?" was his wife's quick question barbed with suspicion.

"Everything, unfortunately," answered Storrow, remembering his arrant neglect of material things during the past few months. And realizing that he was set on that interview, Torrie no longer actively opposed it. She knew, by the look in his eyes and the firmer line about his mouth, that her husband was resolved on prompt and pregnant action.

Three hours, in fact, after a talk over the long-distance wire had assured him that Charlotte was still at Swansea, he was stepping into the wine-coloured roadster with which she met him at the trim-plotted little Long Island station. She said little, on the way home, but she made no effort to conceal the fact that she was glad to see him. She glanced at him searchingly when he explained that he had come to talk about the Amasa Kirkner farm.

"You mean the Owen Storrow farm," she quietly corrected. "Or haven't you wakened up to the fact yet that it belongs as completely to you as — well, as this car does to me?"

Beyond that, however, she troubled him with no questioning and no criticism. And he found relief in that lucid and care-free relationship, uncomplicated by mis-

givings and doubts and suspicions. It seemed like stepping out of fetid rooms into fresh air.

Nor did it surprise him, when she reached home, to hear her declare that it was a crime to waste even an hour of such a perfect June day indoors.

"Let's tramp those hills again, Owen," she suggested, "and we can talk things over as we go."

So they started out across the open country, on foot, almost gaily, almost with a sense of truancy in their hearts. Yet it was only spasmodically and incidentally that they touched on the affairs of the Lake Erie farm, for their thoughts were elsewhere engaged. They skirted the parked grounds of a club-house and mounted high above the vivid green slopes of a golf-links where they could see flannel-clad figures moving ant-like across the lower emerald levels. It was not until they had reached a hill-top solitude with nothing but leafy whisperings about them that Storrow told her he was about to leave New York.

"For good?" she said, coming to a stop.

"Yes, for good," he acknowledged, with his gaze fixed on the sweeping line of the Sound, as clean and hard as the curving blade of a simitar.

"And that's why you're going up to the farm?" she asked, suddenly moved by the look of desolation in his eyes.

He nodded, and her face became grave. Then into her questioning eyes leaped a light which he had seen there before, a light of which he was almost afraid.

"Owen," she said, out of the silence which had fallen over them both. "Supposing I asked you to take me up there with you. What would you say?"

She spoke quietly, yet he noticed that the colour had faded out of her face. It had been unfair, he suddenly realized, to hold back what he should have told her before. And now it was going to be very hard to explain. It was going to be almost impossible to explain.

"No," she called out, with a quick and warning gesture. "Don't say it!" The colour had flowed back into her face, perceptibly deeper than when she had first turned to him. "I mean you've said it already, without speaking a word."

"But Caddie," he began, unthinkingly using the name of her early childhood. She cut him short, however, with the music of her laughter, slightly forced.

"Let's walk," she commanded. And he had to hurry to catch up with her as she struck out across-fields.

"Isn't it odd," she remarked after they had walked on in silence for several minutes, "how little life's big moments can be and how big the little moments sometimes seem!"

The note of wistfulness in her voice left him depressed and ill-at-ease. He had the feeling of standing before her a blind and blundering failure. She was much the more self-possessed of the two as he stopped to help her over a broken stone-wall. But instead of mounting that wall she sat down on its rough surface and stared out over meadowlands of undulating and rippling green.

"I've something to tell you," she said, "that is going to surprise you. At least I think it's going to surprise you," she amended as she looked at him with clear and courageous eyes. "I'm going to marry Chester Hardy."

"Hardy?" repeated Storrow, feeling the need of time in which to digest his shock. And Charlotte, as she watched the meadow-grasses, moved her head slowly up and down.

"He's been thoughtful and kind in such unexpected ways, these last few months," she went on. "And I really like him. I like him a lot. And as time goes on I know that I'll get to like him more than ever. There's something so orderly and dependable about him, quite outside his kindliness. And that's always a comfortable thing to know."

She accepted his silence without questioning, and a

vague ache crept into his heart as they came to a stop on the breezier crest of the hills overlooking farmland and villa and Sound and the blue-grey shoreland beyond. It was not love winged with desire, for desire, he knew, was beyond him. It was more a ghostly yet poignant regret at the absence of desire, a knowledge of implacable loss and deprivation, an ache almost as sorrowfully strong as the ache of love itself. Her mouth, for all the smile that played about it as she stared out across the open country, seemed unhappy. And deep in the misty violet of her eyes was a trouble which he could not and dare not define.

His scrutiny seemed to embarrass her, for she suddenly looked down at her skirt of black serge, laughing a little as she shook out the folds of cloth.

"See the burrs," she cried, half in dismay, for their tramp had taken them far from beaten paths. "Last year's cockles and beggar-ticks and devil's boot-jacks!"

He knelt on the ground in front of her and picked the burrs from the cloth, one by one. The wind whipped it from side to side, so that he was compelled to hold it by a loose fold until the last burr had been removed. Then, still kneeling before her, he placed his arms about her knees. He clasped them, with his head bowed. There was unexpected humility in his attitude, and also hunger, a forlorn and undefined hunger touched with a vast hopelessness.

Her breast heaved as she continued to stare across field and hill and valley to the Sound so far below them, the Sound which had once brought them together. But she did not speak. For a moment or two, as he knelt there, the tips of her fingers rested on his head. For a moment or two, also, as he stood at her side again, her hand clung to his arm. It reminded him that there would be times when she would know the need for help and that the glory of sustaining her would never be his. Things had been otherwise ordained. But the memory

of what she might have brought to him left a vague and wordless misery compressing about his heart. He stood looking at her in a sort of valedictory wistfulness, in no wise bitterly, but more as one looks at the tender dead. She was holding her lips tightly together, proudly, almost combatively. The wind had whipped her hair loose and held the serge skirt close in against her knees, making him think of St. Gauden's *Victory*. The ghost of a smile came to her face as their eyes met.

"We must go back now," was all she said. But her breast heaved again as she started on ahead of him, along the downward sloping path.

Five minutes later she looked up and said to him: "Justin can motor you in to town tonight, after dinner. That will get you back by ten o'clock."

. . . . . .

When Storrow opened his studio door that night he was accosted first by an exceptional glare of light and next by an unmistakable odour of ether. He was in through that door, in fact, before he quite realized the alterations in a once-familiar room. His heart stopped and skipped a beat as he beheld a bearded man in a white surgical gown standing beside his buhl table, over which a fresh sheet had been placed. On this sheet rested a white porcelain tray on which in turn lay a curette and speculum, beside a number of instruments with a scattering of high lights from their polished metal surface. On the couch-bed, which had been moved out toward the centre of the room, lay Torrie, and beside her, with her finger-tips pressed against one wrist, sat a woman in the white cap and uniform of a trained nurse. Another woman, also in white, was engaged in quietly but expeditiously putting the room to rights. She stopped for a moment in the midst of folding a rubber sheet at the sudden sight of Storrow and his colourless face. The bearded man in the surgical gown must have been conscious of that arrested movement, for he swung about

and with a coldly appraising eye inspected the newcomer.

"What's happened? What in the name of God has happened?" Storrow cried out in sudden terror, for from Torrie's drooling lips were coming those incoherent and animal-like sounds not unusual in a patient emerging from an anæsthetic.

"Is your name Storrow?" asked the man in the white gown, utterly undisturbed by all that seemed so harrowing to the other man.

"Yes — but what *is it?*" gasped that other man.

"I'm Doctor Eggert, the house physician at *The Sansonia.*"

"Yes,— yes — go on!"

"I attended Torrie at *The Alwyn Arms* when she broke her ankle last year. She is a wonderful girl."

Storrow stared at him with almost hate in his eyes.

"But what has happened?" he repeated with a quickly rising inflection which caused the surgeon in the gown to lift his eyebrows a little as he led the younger man slightly to one side.

"There is nothing to be unduly alarmed about," he asserted with cool and professional impersonality. "It is merely that your wife has had an accident, a not unusual accident. I regret to say, though, that she has lost her child."

"Lost her child!" echoed Storrow, vacuously, staring towards the bed from which the diminishing animal sounds were coming with less frequency. Then shame overtook him at his impending hysteria, as he looked from figure to figure and realized that they at least were entirely self-controlled and self-possessed. His eyes, as they sought the doctor's face, were haggard. "But how could a thing like that happen to Torrie?" he asked, with his lips twitching.

"Watch the pulse, please, Miss Slocum," Doctor Eggert called back over his shoulder, as sounds of stentorious breathing came from the bed. Then he turned back

to the white-faced man beside him. "As far as I understand the circumstances, an elderly man visited your apartment this afternoon, a man by the name of Modrynski. Here he had a sharp, in fact, a fatal heart-attack. Torrie, apparently, tried to lift him from the bed and carry him out to the hall. It was unfortunate, of course, for the strain"—

"Modrynski!" whispered Storrow. He was unconscious of the fact that he was standing alone again, for the white-gowned figure had left his side and was stooping over the reviving woman on the bed.

He saw misty white figures moving decorously about. He heard the sound of voices, controlled and quiet, impersonal and authoritative. Then he awakened to the fact that Doctor Eggert was speaking to him.

"Torrie wants you," he heard that coolly indifferent voice call out to him.

He crossed to the bed, and stared down into Torrie's face, still swollen and slightly purplish in hue. Her eyes seemed unnaturally dark in the strong light, and some difficulty in focussing them made it hard, for a moment, for her to distinguish her husband. She reached out weakly for his hand.

"Oh, Owen," she cried as the tears welled from her eyes and ran down the still swollen face. "I wanted my baby! My poor l'il baby! My poor l'il baby!"

Storrow took her groping fingers and held them. It was all there seemed to do. For a vast and denuding apathy had taken possession of him. It was the past, he remembered, the implacable past, reaching out a hand for its own.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

TORRIE THROSSEL and her husband had been three weeks at " Pine-Brae," as Amasa Kirkner had once christened the Ontario fruit-farm which sloped down from The Ridge to the slate-cliffs overlooking the tumbling blue waters of Lake Erie.

It was high noon of a flawless June-end day. Flat on his back, on a Navajo rug stretched out in a grassy hollow along the cliff-edge, lay Storrow with a sweat-stained felt hat pulled low over his tanned and stubbled face, to keep the sun out of his eyes. Slightly higher up on the sloping shelf of greensward lay Torrie, bare-headed, in a soiled " middy-blouse " and a much crumpled skirt of duck. She had kicked off her incongruous jet-beaded slippers, and lay on her stomach with her chin in her hands and her silk-stockinged feet drumming lazily and intermittently on the turf. She stared at her husband, who after a morning of farm-toil seemed glad enough of this half-hour of contented and animal-like inactivity.

" You lazy hound," she said sleepily and affectionately as she tossed a handful of grass along his hat-rim. But he neither moved nor spoke. Then she sat up and stared at the red-brick house shaded by its cluster of lordly pines. She could see Absalom, the aged negro man-servant who had so recently been transported from the neighbouring county-seat to Pine-Brae, slowly and croon-ingly clearing the dinner table that had been set in the cooler shadow of the side-porch with its bright new awn-ings of taupe and willow-green stripes. Absalom, who boasted of having been a *chef* of fame in his younger

days, still wore the white cotton gloves with which he invariably served a meal. Torrie, who had promptly shortened his name into "Abe" and later expanded it to "Uncle Abe," found it possible to talk with this old negro by the hour. And now, as he moved about the cool shadows and from time to time disappeared into the cooler gloom of the house itself, he seemed a fit and venerable figure to be presiding about so old and venerable a homestead. And it had been an amazingly substantial dinner of asparagus soup and roast-beef and vegetables and strawberry dumpling and coffee and clotted cream, a dinner which had prompted Torrie, before tapping her cigarette-end on her polished thumb-nail, to resort to certain subterranean and surreptitious movements of waist-band releasings. The open air and the somewhat heady bottled ale which her husband had laid in for her, on a compact to abstain from more ardent spirits during her period of convalescence, had left her singularly drowsy and contented in spirit. She turned lazily about to rescue her slipper from Skookum, the collie pup which Owen after much travel and trouble had obtained from a neighbouring farm, on her ultimatum that she must have a dog. But Skookum's companionship had proved not entirely without its drawbacks, since with the voracity of youth this pup indiscriminately chewed up hats and papers and shoes, and frayed the ends of the new striped awnings, and started runs in Torrie's silk stockings by affectionately biting at her ankles after clamorous and excited racings about the pine grove in which Skookum invariably proved how easily four legs could outrun two.

Torrie, after another glance at her motionless husband, turned and stared out over the misty blue of the lake, along which drifted an opal sail or two. High over her she could see cliff-swallows darting and circling. Faintly, from the beach below, came the sound of water. The air was filled with the quiet droning of bees, engaged in their repetitious visits to over-weighted dandelion-

heads. Back in the dark green boughs of the pines, which murmured unceasingly in the soft breeze, a wood-pigeon repeated its monotonous complaint.

"Kill-a-coon! Kill-a-coon!" Torrie lazily repeated in mockery of the bird as she commandeered the lower half of her husband's Navajo rug and after dusting his nose with a head of blue-grass drew Skookum closer in against the hollow of her relaxed body. Once or twice she stroked the furry neck with her sunburned hand. Then sun and air and tranquillizing noonday noises seemed to combine and surround her like an anæsthetic. She sighed profoundly, reached up for Storrow's worn felt hat, covered her face with it, and fell asleep.

Storrow, with the hot sun directly in his eyes, stirred and sat up. He looked at his watch, remembering there was still much to be done that day. Then he looked at the warm red brick of the house mottled with cooler patches of shadow, and decided that before another year a new roof would be necessary and that the threateningly ruinous east chimney would have to be rebuilt. He was finding, in fact, an almost bewildering amount of work in the rehabilitation of that long abandoned farm. But it was work in which he lost himself with a quite uncomplaining and contented spirit. It tired his body and dulled his mind and kept him from thinking of the past. He felt, in a way, that it was a process of rebarbarization. But it brought him peace, and peace, after all, was a great and wonderful thing in life.

He turned and looked down at Torrie. The felt hat had slipped a little to one side, leaving her face exposed. He was amazed by the changes which he could see there. She had filled out and gained in weight. Open air life, in fact, had brought about some mysterious process of rejuvenation with her. The once milky white skin had taken on a deeper colouring. The passive and sleeping face, he could see, was unmistakably sunburned, with a small runway of turkey-spots across the narrow bridge of

the nose. She looked half-gypsy, almost peasant-like to him, until from beneath her tumbled duck skirt he caught sight of the finest of silk underskirts which she still persisted in wearing, and the sheer silk stockings against which Skookum rested a quietly sleeping nose. She was not, he remembered, a child of the soil. She still looked upon this, her first taste of life in the country, as a sort of continuous picnic where hardships were an adventure to be laughed at, where recurring wonder at utterly new conditions tended to make up for an environment that was far from eventful. He smiled as he remembered her futile little efforts at gardening, her plots of transplanted and patted-down wild-flowers, carefully marked with sticks, seemingly more the product of a child's hand than a woman's. She lamented audibly over the drooping and broken-rooted ferns, which she had quite forgotten to water, just as she railed against the injustice of nature in allowing flies to cluster about and torment the body of their newly purchased Jersey cow, which she had promptly christened "Aprilis," after a one-time Casino stage-associate of hers. For a day or two she had even laboriously and patiently fanned these flies away from the tawny flanks of "Aprilis," using branches of elderberry which she broke from the fence-line. And invariably, when evening came, she heralded milking-time by inquiring if she could help "page" Aprilis, though it took her fully a week to overcome her distaste for milk so disturbingly associated with its biologic process of production. She stormed at the robins for encroaching on her neglected and none too productive patch of strawberries, for never before had she picked that fruit from the vine, and she usually came from the patch with her mouth stained scarlet, like a greedy child's. So keen was her delight in gathering eggs that Storrow had more than once secretly augmented the contents of a nest, for the mere sake of over-hearing her shrill shout of triumph as she dropped to her knees and excitedly com-

puted the extent of her harvest. But she looked on a clover-field as something merely to careen across with her hair flying and the carefully mounded cocks of fresh-cut hay as merely something odorous and inviting to tumble about and bury oneself in.

What had surprised Storrow, however, was the completeness of her contentment in it all. There had already grown up between them a tacit agreement to make no mention of that past on which they had so completely turned their backs. If she thought of that past at all, she did so in secret. Yet Storrow knew that she was not entering into the life of Pine-Brae as he had entered into it. She was merely catching from it the momentary delights of the momentary pagan. She could munch inordinate quantities of green apples, and call with excitement at the sight of a wild rabbit, and coo with admiration at her first glimpse of a cat-bird's nest filled with its four small eggs of heavenly blue, or wade barefooted with her skirts held high above her golden knees, along the shallow beach of rippled sand. But she understood little what Storrow meant when he complained that he had come to Pine-Brae too late to take the farm in hand for that season. And at night, when he sat with his pipe, slightly heavy-eyed with physical weariness, poring over plans and compiling ever-growing lists of their household needs, she would wheedle old Abe into romancing about the days of the Fenian Raid and the more antiquated and accordingly more highly-coloured adventures of The Underground, whereby the southern slaves of the old days had once escaped into Canada. Then Abe, ceremoniously donning his white gloves, would bring cheese and crackers and the bottled ale from the cellar, and Torrie, drowsy with that heady brew, would take Storrow's pipe away from him and ask: "Isn't it bed-time, Honey?"

She liked to sleep late, though on one pellucid morning of opal and pearl and pale rose she had got up with him

a little after four in the morning, to see the sun-rise. She had greeted that ball of molten gold with song, throaty and care-free and slightly flat, from the highest knoll along their cliff-front, and later they had dodged from sumach-bush to sumach-bush shaking little showers of dew down on each other from the dripping leaves. Then they had clambered down the cliff-front to the beach and bathed there together, naked as Adam and Eve, in the motionless water of the lake. There she had drawn his attention to how sunburned her neck and shoulders were, dark by comparison with the milky whiteness of the torso-skin. But as she leaned back against the cliff, wistful and abstracted-eyed, her attitude and expression sent his mind flashing back to Vibbard and Vibbard's earlier painting of her. The glory went out of that perfect June morning, and he ate breakfast that day in a heavy and none too happy silence. For he was struggling in vain to keep from thinking of the dead past, which is never quite dead. And when he thought of the future, it was always with one ever-disturbing and ever-unanswered question recurring to him: the question of how long that fragile card-house of contentment might last.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE quietly flowing days ran into weeks, and the weeks widened into months, and the green faded a little in leaf and lawn, and Summer grew old. Storrow, still deep in his work of reconstruction, watched the shortening of the days, watched them with that indeterminate regret which attaches to the passing of all earthly beauty. He watched them, too, with a small and slowly growing anxiety. Torrie could still be heard singing now and then as she worked or idled about in the open sunlight. She still raced with Skookum, and talked interminably with the adoring old Abe, and remained discreetly silent on everything but the present. But a change was taking place. A dormant restlessness of spirit which still manifested itself only in oblique and accidental ways seemed to be creeping over her. This restlessness, the guardedly watchful Storrow was able to perceive, invariably became more marked just after their evening meal. That, he remembered, was the theatre hour, the hour which in her old life had imposed exceptional movement and activity on his wife. A vestigial remnant of that old call seemed still to stir her blood, making it hard for her to remain quiet at the very hour when all the world about her seemed settling into slumber. Once, too, as she sat on the wide verandah, staring out over the slate-blue waters of the lake, she had startled him by jumping to her feet with an exclamation of angry protest.

"Those mourning-doves nearly drive me *crazy,*" she protested. "They sound like a hearse-plume set to

music. Kill-a-coon! Kill-a-coon! Hour after hour — the same old thing — over and over again!"

One day when the wind was out of the North and the sky-line of the lake was a dark green, Storrow thought he detected a small shiver sweep through her relaxed body. He looked up and asked her if she was cold.

"No," she said in a disturbingly flat and listless voice. "I was only wondering what this place is going to be like in winter. And Uncle Abe tells me your Canadian winters last a good half of the year."

"And to anybody but a nigger," protested Storrow, "it's the finest of all our seasons."

Torrie laughed. "Then you can count me among the coloured folks," she said as she began to pace back and forth along the verandah.

Storrow watched those restless movements, vaguely depressed. A feeling crept through him that, after all, his carefully carpentered structure of contentment had been built on dubious foundations. It was built, in fact, on no foundation whatever. At its best, it was only a bivouac. He was able, as he thought this over, to attribute a deeper meaning to certain trivial incidents and moods of the last few weeks. Torrie was not as happy as she had pretended, just as he had not been as contented as he had desired. Always over his head had hung that Damocles' sword of a life still chiefly governed by caprice. Yet always he had planned and campaigned to hold together what was left of existence, feeling that this campaign was one of self-preservation for both of them. And there was still the glimmer that must not be let go entirely out.

"What are you thinking about?" demanded Torrie, coming to a stop in front of him.

"I was thinking how you'd enjoy that two-mile walk to the post-office for the mail," he evaded, "now that the weather's cooler."

She caught at that suggestion much more eagerly than

he had expected, donning tam and sweater and tan boots and catching up the antiquated riding-crop of Amasa Kirkner as she called gaily for Skookum. And as she disappeared, in a flurry of skirts and laughter, the cloud which had so quickly gathered seemed to have just as rapidly disappeared from the horizon.

Torrie, in fact, had lately formed the habit of walking daily to the post-office for the mail. She needed that four-mile tramp, she explained to Storrow, to harden up. She had "been letting herself go," as she expressed it, until it was a struggle even to get her corsets on in the morning. And if she grew dumpy and humpy her husband wouldn't love her any longer. And ladies had to have their husbands love them, even if they were a thousand miles from civilization.

Storrow stared after her. A summer of open-air life had brought a more vivid tone to the satin-like skin, a clearness to the ruminative and wide-set eyes, a deeper red to the softly curved lips, a fulness and firmness of line to the still buoyant figure. Once more it reminded him, in its vigour and resiliency, of something animal-like, of a paddocked thoroughbred impatient of restraint.

It was a week later that Torrie returned from her daily tramp with the light of a new interest in her eyes. Storrow, disturbed by it, bided his time in silence.

"Owen, what would you say if I told you I was going to visit Detroit for a day or two?" she asked that day at luncheon.

"It's something which your neighbours very frequently do," he announced, with a laugh of relief.

"I never knew I had any neighbours," she amended.

"That's because you've never shown any interest in them," he pointed out to her. And she shrugged a diffident shoulder.

"Well, I'm in rags, anyway," she went on, "completely in rags. I've simply got to stock up with some

new duds. And Mattie Crowder's going to be in Detroit next week with *The Gold Wing Girls,* so I thought it would be a good chance to kill Mattie and the storekeepers with the same stone."

Storrow's relief, at the mention of that name out of their old life, was shorter-lived than he expected. But it would be inexpedient, he concluded, to oppose Torrie's excursion.

He drove her in to the county-seat to catch her train, not a little disquieted by the suddenness with which she had assumed a miraculously citified appearance. He watched her train pull out, waving blithely enough after her as she stood on the platform of the chair-car, yet wordlessly depressed by what he remembered was the first vision of her being carried bodily away from him. He went back to Pine-Brae and to his work of fence-building and roof-mending and fall-pruning, but he was lonely and listless. It dawned on him, for the first time, that life in the country could be a very desolate matter, without some form of companionship.

" 'Tain't the same, sah, wif Mis' Torrie away," averred Uncle Abe, in no way lightening the load that hung on Storrow's heart.

Torrie, however, did not return on the second day, as she had expected, but remained away until the end of the week. There had been alterations to make, she explained, and it was the busy season for the shops and dressmakers. But she demanded of Storrow, as she exhibited herself in her new and transforming apparel, if it had not been worth the wait. She was proud of her clothes, and even prouder of the fact that she had successfully smuggled them across the Line. Beyond this, however, she came back unexpectedly sober-eyed and self-contained, announcing that Mattie was as crazy as ever and that chorus-girls were a pack of children. She even seemed more reconciled to the quiet tenor of life at Pine-Brae, taking up her tasks again with a sort of

jocund preoccupation and resuming her daily walks to the village post-office.

It was two weeks later that Storrow, engaged in teaming his wind-fall apples to the village evaporator, remembered to stop in at this same office and ask for his mail. He was given a couple of papers and a cream-coloured envelope embossed in gold with the name of a Fifth Avenue hotel, addressed to his wife. He turned it over, at first indifferently, and then with a sudden flash of suspicion shooting through his body. Once more back on his wagon-seat he studied the post-mark and the hastily scrawled address. Then he pushed the letter down in his coat-pocket, and once more took it out and studied it. Then with a sudden tightening of the lines about his mouth he inserted a forefinger under the flap of the sealed envelope and tore it open. He took out the folded sheet and read it.

"Am motoring to Detroit again on the twenty-ninth. D. E."

That was all he found written there.

It was non-committal enough. But it was sufficient. That "D. E." he knew, could stand only for Donnie Eastman. And it was not what was openly stated, but all that was implied, which sufficed to take the gladness out of the high-arching autumn sky and bring a dull and leaden ache to the heart of the man so carefully tearing a cream-coloured scrap of paper into small tatters and then letting the breeze whisk them away like a small flurry of snow.

It was not rage that took possession of him, this time; it was more a thin and listless hopelessness which he found himself without the will and without the weapons to combat. And it brought to him a forewarning of the future which he seemed unable to face.

Ten minutes later he met Torrie herself swinging to-

wards him down the road, with Skookum running circles about her. The colour in her cheeks was high, and as he drew up at the roadside and awaited her he was inwardly disturbed by the air of openness and honest vigour about her.

"Climb in," he called out in a mockery of gaiety, for he realized now that he must exercise a craft to meet her own.

"But I'm going for the mail," she explained.

"The mail? Oh, I got that on my way," he carelessly announced, with his hand against the coat-pocket into which the papers had been thrust.

"Anything worth while?" she just as carelessly inquired as she clambered up into the wagon-seat beside him.

His eyes were on the road ahead of him as he reached into his pocket and handed her the papers. But her little *moue* of disappointment as she took them in her hand and turned them over did not escape him.

It was trivial enough, he told himself. In some ways, indeed, it was almost laughable, that double-sided game of deception, but the more he thought about it the more it impressed him as becoming tremendous in both significance and dimensions. For on trivialities such as these, he remembered, would surely hinge some vast and impending movement which he dreaded to define. Yet, to the casual eye, there was no change in his attitude towards Torrie. He merely became more self-contained and more guarded in his watchfulness, surprising himself, now and then, in a newly acquired habit of inspecting his wife as though she were a newcomer into his life and all knowledge as to her character remained still a matter of guess-work. Sometimes, as he found himself becoming more and more adept in craft, ready to match duplicity with duplicity and with the habit of covertly watching her more relentlessly imposed upon him, he suffered from a secret and indeterminate resentment

which only rarely flamed up into anything approaching a dull rage. In those occasional moments of stronger emotion he felt the need of making her suffer, even as he stood doubly confounded by the suspicion that in all likelihood she already stood beyond the power of being made to suffer by him.

One night when a promise of frost had prompted them to light an open fire in the dark-beamed living-room, homely with its old walnut and brass, he sat watching her from under lowered lids. He sat watching her, sheltered behind his carefully sustained pretence of drowsiness. She was mending his work-shirts and had complained as she went on with her stitching that he was terribly hard on his clothes, almost as hard on them as he was on his wife. She was sitting in the diffused rose-glow from the hickory-logs and the loveliness of her face as she bent smilingly over her task struck him to the heart with almost the keenness of a knife-thrust. He felt the need of her, just as he felt the impossibility of holding her there once her will desired to carry her elsewhere. He had no means of anchoring or encaging her. It would be as impossible to capture and imprison her as it would be to capture and imprison a soap-bubble. She had alighted in his life as a golden-oriole alights on one of his orchard-trees, to sing busily enough for its moment, and then pass on again.

Torrie stopped in her work and glanced up at him, disturbed by his sudden small body-movement of misery. She smiled at him companionably, but there was no answering smile on his preoccupied face.

"Here I am working my fingers to the bone," she lightly complained, "for a husband who doesn't even care for me any more!"

She laughed as she said it, but her eyes became abstracted as she turned her face to the fire.

"What makes you think that?" demanded Storrow, almost fiercely, as he caught her wrist in an iron clasp.

"Because you're so icebergy," she told him, looking down at the wrist which he had imprisoned.

"Is that the only reason?" asked her husband, swinging her about by the shoulders so that her eyes faced his.

"It's reason enough, when you know there's a reason for the reason," she cryptically announced, lowering her gaze before the suddenly unreasoning and masterful stare of the other. For something far removed from the mere consciousness of her beauty had fired the train of dormant sex-impulse in Storrow. He knew a forlorn craving to bend her still to his will, to proclaim his mastery over the body which housed the spirit which denied and defied him. He was swept by a sudden passion to make her his, if only for the moment.

She made an effort to thrust him back, as he took possession of her, and stared up almost startled into his storm-clouded eyes. But she became passive as he caught her in his arms and crushed her against his body, with his lips on hers in an impassioned kiss which perplexed her much more than it moved her. Then she became pliant and relaxed in his clasp. And he understood, as reason returned to him, why she kept her face averted from his eyes.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

IT was a week later that Torrie, after one of her solitary walks, returned home later than usual. Her air of suppressed excitement alternating with periods of abstraction did not escape the watchful-eyed Storrow. He was disturbed, subliminally, as creatures of the wild are disturbed by vague scents of an unseen enemy wafted up-wind. He watched her that day, and on the days that followed, with guarded and jealous eyes. But he said nothing and did nothing, for the simple reason that instinct told him there was nothing to say or do.

He had been prompted, at first, to follow Torrie. But that was an impulse which he dismissed, glad as he would have been of the chance to bring things to a head. He hated the thought of dodging and skulking after her. And she could not be watched forever, no matter how he stooped to the tricks and degradations of espionage. The situation, he came to feel, was something which now lay in the lap of the gods.

Torrie, in the meantime, had twice secretly met Donnie Eastman, and had twice returned home from those meetings with a strangely contradictory feeling of power mingled with frustration. Keen as was her woman's joy born of the knowledge that she could control a fellow-being, and a fellow-being who had drunk deep of life, by her smile or frown, she was intimidated by the discovery that the reckless-eyed Donnie had come to her to demand the impossible. And while nothing, as yet, had come of either those meetings or those demands, Torrie also carried the disquieting conviction that her destiny

was in some way high above her reach on the lap of the gods.

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Donnie Eastman, as Torrie Throssel had once intimated, practically always got what he wanted. This was due to the fact, perhaps, that his wants were generally material and corporeal. After migrating from three seats of learning where the atmosphere had proved over-austere to his unfettered spirit, and on leaving Harvard before the end of his second year at that institution, he found himself the sole and undisputed possessor of a fortune officially estimated at close to seventeen million dollars. This fortune had been accumulated by an over-cerebral and over-active parent, who, after living a year and a half on zwieback and peptonized milk, died quite unexpectedly and miserably of malnutrition. Since any movement appertaining to or even resembling the dispersal of wealth so sedulously garnered was instinctively distasteful to this parent, it so happened that an only son in whom he had no confidence and for whom he had no respect became the possessor of a somewhat bewildering estate which had not been actually destined for his ownership.

So Donnie became a spender. It was all that he stood equipped to become, and it was all that was demanded of him. In this, however, he betrayed no particular talent and even less originality, his spending following the urban and predetermined grooves of custom. He eschewed, it is true, the sterner sports of the polo-field and the hydroplane, and his earlier experiments with racing-yachts did not long survive the discovery that comfort on all such craft was relentlessly sacrificed to speed. He was equally unhappy in his efforts at establishing a "stable," and was glad enough to relinquish his interest in track-horses, which never seemed to acquire the art of running first, for the sedater and more pictorial task of "tooling" a coach-and-four up Fifth Avenue and out to

Rye. He was not, however, without certain definite impulses towards distinction. He could wring a clearly defined glory out of being known as the only member of the Cloister Club whose bar-bill for one year had exceeded twenty-five thousand dollars. For a dinner-dance which he gave one Spring, the ball-room of Delmonico's was transformed into an actual apple-orchard in bloom, as duly recounted and moralized over in the public prints. An equally historic dinner of Donnie's was one which was brought from Paris to New York by a French *chef,* on a French steamer, and three hours after that steamer had docked the Lucullus with a slight lisp was dining amid his satellites, *more Gallico,* to the music of a French Orchestra reinforced with a grand-opera singer who sandwiched *The Marseilles* between two dubious French songs first made known to the world by Yvette Guilbert.

But that great waffle-iron known as New York soon turned Donnie Eastman from an individual into a type. He seemed to find his natural element more and more in that *subterrania* so mistakenly denominated as "Broadway" life. He did not altogether abjure his clubs, or his Indian River house-boat, or his villa at Villefranche, or his lodge in the Adirondacks. But more and more his amusements centred about women. This meant that he more and more frequented those planes and purlieus where the gilt-lettered decameron of urban night-life is written. He ruffled it along the White Light Lane, identifying himself with that lighter form of theatrical entertainment known as musical comedy. Yet even here his activities occasionally took on the atmosphere of a commercial venture, since he found as keen a zest in backing aspiring personality, in the form of "angel," as he had once found in backing race-horses, in the form of owner. While this brought him no immediate personal success, it sometimes brought him that contiguity with success which occasionally can

be almost as appeasing as success itself. It brought him, too, into contact with extremely engaging and provocative ladies, amid whom in their idle hours he fluttered like a pigeon about a granary. If there were many of them that he desired, it may also be written that there were few of them that he desired for long. He developed, in fact, into an assiduous if not over-adept hunter of heads, after the manner of the Dyaks, not so much because of any intrinsic value of the heads, but more because of the satisfaction to be derived from their acquisition.

It was for this reason that Torrie Throssel had challenged him, from the first. She had always laughingly but alluringly held herself beyond his reach. She had even hurt him, at times, by her airy contempt, evading his not unsophisticated machinations towards some more and more personal enmeshment, even mocking his slight lisp and smiling at his vague and visionary threats. And as he was more rudimentary than he appeared, for all his craving to make life complex, he reacted to an opposition so novel in a manner quite to be expected. When he wanted a thing, he wanted it. He had never learned to accept actual defeat. He declined even to nurse the thought of defeat. And that which evaded him only added tang to a triumph deferred.

All this he had intimated to Torrie, on more occasions than one, but never more frequently and forcibly than during the *tableaux vivants* at *The Biltmore*. But she had merely smiled down at him from her abstracted and shadowy eyes, allowing him to advance so far, and no farther. And that was something new to Donnie Eastman. She stood not unflattered by his desperation, not unexhilarated by a sense of power born of her growing mastery over his moods and movements. Nor was she, having known poverty, altogether ignorant of the consolations of wealth. But when, in his desperation, he even admitted his willingness to marry her, protesting that he could stand for the "Reno racket" if he had to, she

explained to him that she was really serious about her stage-work and had known quite enough of married life, for at that time she and Storrow were ominously unsettled in their relations. Donnie had then bitterly accused her of being in love with Krassler, who valued her, he protested, only as a human phonograph. Krassler, he proclaimed, would make her a star, but he would kill her soul and break her spirit in the process.

"And what will *you* do?" Torrie had calmly asked him.

"I'll give you the biggest house on Ocean Drive," protested Donnie.

"That, Donnie dear, is not enough," Torrie had just as calmly replied, slightly in doubt as to what particular city "Ocean Drive" might be said to decorate.

Donnie, with life confronting him with his first actual defeat, resorted to that meagre consolation which may be wrung from the fermented juice of the grape. He resorted also to the purchase of a new and more powerful motor-car, which he took a hectic joy in driving at top-speed, with his own hand. This dull-toned and over-engined monster of power he preferred to drive stripped of its top — very much as old drinkers prefer to take their spirits neat — since his first demand was for the full effect of speed. Yet neither heavy drinking nor illegal speeding quite sufficed to obliterate the trouble which was breaking his sleep by night and devastating his life by day. He had failed in the first big want of his existence. And as he stood unequipped to face all such failure, he eventually broke his promise to Torrie and after twice writing to her he tooled his huge supertwelve up the valley of the Hudson toward the Great Lakes.

He did not go directly into Canada, for there was still some trace of reason in his madness. But he motored to the border-city of Detroit, making that point the

rendezvous for repeated impatient ventures along the highways of western Ontario. He was drinking heavily again, and his driving along these highways was not always controlled. This he realized when he came to a sharp bend in the Lake Road a few miles east of Leamington. There the highway, turning sharply back from the eroded lake-cliffs, formed an acute angle which could be safely approached only at a low rate of speed. But low rates of speed were obnoxious to Donnie, even in unknown territory, and the result was that although he saved his car from caroming straight out over the cliff-edge, he went crashing and uncontrolled into the roadside fence.

He climbed down from the stalled car and walked unsteadily out to the edge of the cliff. There was a sheer fall, he saw, of almost a hundred feet. He was still staring down at the crawling lake-waves tipped with white when a stooped-shouldered and much bewhiskered native with a pitch-fork over his shoulder came and walked inquisitively about the car with the broken headlights. Having completed that inspection, he just as inquisitively inspected the moody-eyed stranger returning from the cliff-edge.

"Had a smash-up, eh?" he cheerily inquired.

"No; this is the way I always stop at a corner," announced Donnie Eastman, with a snap of his thin jaws. He had an odd affection for that huge-engined car of his, and willing as he was to over-drive it, he hated to see bodily harm done to it. Only that day, as he crossed on the ferry to Windsor, a wharf-rat in looking it over had said, with the rising inflection of inarticulate admiration: "Some *car!*" And Donnie was in no wise prepared to disagree with him.

"So that's how yeh stop? Hee-hee! Guess it'd pay yeh to keep on a-goin', then," responded the native with the pitch-fork.

"Well, it's a hell of a road you hicks around here give a man to keep going on," retorted Donnie, turning to investigate the extent of the damage.

"Right yeh air, stranger, and I've told th' Reeve as much as three times in the past month somethin' ought 'o be done about ironin' out this here flare-back, now that so many rabbit-heads be a-motorin' along the lake front, disregardin' the road-laws 'bout the same as they disregard common-sense. It gives th' County a bad name, havin' a turn in the finest bit o' road in the township known as Death's Curve. And old Eph Johnson has hed to re-wire that bit o' fence o' his no less'n seven times in one summer!"

But Donnie was less interested in Eph Johnson's misfortunes and rural road-building than he was in re-starting his car and disentangling its fenders from fence-wire and beholding it crawl safely back to the road-bed. He went on his way feeling that all life was against him, that nothing much remained to live for, and that it wouldn't have mattered a great deal even if he had taken that final leap out over the cliff-edge at Death's Curve. Yet before the end of an hour, as he sped eastward, he came face to face with Torrie Throssel.

He parked the car in a buttonwood grove down a side-road and walked back to meet her. She was nervous and guarded, but she was not altogether antagonistic, for his presence there had at least brought a splash of colour into the monotony of her endless and over-drab days. There was satisfaction, too, in the discovery that time had brought no diminution in her power over him. But she insisted on discretion. And as they sat on the running-board of the car behind the fluttering-leafed grove of buttonwoods, smoking their last cigarettes together, she promised to meet him again in two days' time.

They met again, as arranged, but something in Donnie's bloodshot eyes and the unsteadiness of his hands prompted to make Torrie wary. She cut the meeting

short, protesting that she could talk to him only when he was sober. She was equally disturbed in spirit when they met for the third time, the following week. And still again she told him, as plainly as she could, that his hopes were useless, that she could not ever see him again. Yet she yielded to his persistence when he steadily and stubbornly demanded that she at least have one last ride with him.

She sat beside him, with a watchful eye divided between the road and the speedometer-dial, knowing that he was not himself, and still further disturbed when he began to quote to her what he described as a poem of Browning's:

> "I and my mistress, side by side,
> Shall be together, breathe, and ride." . . .

Then he slowed down, not because of her cry of warning, but to reach into the door-pocket beside him and take out a leather-covered flask. He needed a nip of brandy, he explained, to steady his nerves.

He merely laughed when Torrie, with troubled eyes, told him to drive slowly. He thrust a toe down on the accelerator, as he had done so often before when some lighter-spirited chorus-girl had called out to him: "Step on her tail, Sweetie!" For he liked that feeling of power, the power of a god, under his foot-lever. It transported him to some higher plane. It converted the sound of the wind against his ear-drums into a long trumpeting of triumph. Two eagernesses nested in his narrow body as he sat there, with the dusty miles swimming under his foot-boards. One was the eagerness for rapture, the other was the eagerness for expenditure. That, in fact, was all that his life had been designed for, all that he had ever been capable of. Existence itself was beyond his control, but he sat the king of this machine of winged wheels. There he seemed to become the culmination of all endeavour, the ultimate flower of all

effort, since metal was first wrought and man first sweated for it in the bowels of the earth and tapped the veins of the buried ages for his panting vapours of power.

"Where are we going?" Torrie cried out in alarm as the over-driven car-wheels slewed in the road-dust.

"You're coming with me," was Donnie's deliberate yet shrill-noted response.

"Not today, Donnie dear," she called out, forcing a laugh which was meant to be placatory, for she was beginning to be a little afraid of him.

"You're coming with me!" he sullenly repeated, with his foot once more hard down on the accelerator. He had the power that he loved now, and he was as drunk with it as he was with the liquor out of the leather-covered flask. And the wind of speed fanned that intoxication, fanned it until it seemed too fierce a conflagration for his small body to hold. He gloried in the bolted steel that shuddered with its latent energy, purring and panting with desire, seeming to be whining to be let out, like a hound on a leash.

"But I can't go with you!" Torrie called out to him, with one hand clinging to her hat-rim. She was leaning forward like a jockey, braced against the on-rush of the air whipping her body.

"You'll go with no one else," he drunkenly proclaimed, touched with some final essence as he continued to race on, some final essence which was both bitter and sweet to his fevered soul. It carried with it the abandonment of the nuptial-bee which dies madly in the azure of mid-heaven, the frenzied glory of the moth that reels gladly to the lamp-flame. He insisted on kingship. And to hold his throne, he knew, he must continue to flail the face of the earth with his leaping tires, he must drink up a murky road in throbbing miles, he must throw across the empty spaces of light that crouching body of his which rocked against the body of the woman who could never be his. Once he had been a mere man, a man with a lisp

that other men had sometimes laughed at: but poised god-like behind his wheel of mahogany and metal he was something god-like. His control was unchallenged, undisputed. And etheric waves of intoxication continued to sweep through the narrow body of bone and sinew and tissue so tragically fragile in comparison with the winged machine on which it was mounted, just as the brain chambered within that body poised flame-like above the flesh that could follow only brokenly after its chaotic impulses, its blind and self-defeating desires.

"Donnie!" the woman at his side called out, almost in a scream. But she was calling to a man in a trance, with exaltation in his over-open eyes. He did not answer her. Nor did he slacken by a jot the speed of the car.

Torrie had no definite idea of what was ahead of her. But she was alert in both mind and body. And as they went thundering down that stretch of road which turns sharply at what was known to the country-side as Death's Curve, she knew, by one of those incredibly quick deductions which come to even the most elementary minds, that a car travelling at a rate of speed anything like theirs could never keep to the road. A sudden and sickening suspicion that Donnie Eastman might have no intention of keeping to the road did not come to her until the huge car went arrowing from the beaten path up the slight incline of dust-covered grass where the fragile mockery of a wire fence stood between them and the sheer brink of the lake-cliffs. At the same moment that she realized nothing could now stop the car in its mad flight, she drew herself together, in an instinctive preparatory movement for leaping.

It was the car beneath her, however, that leaped heavily, like an over-driven race-horse, even as her hand groped for the door at her side, for there was a sharp break in the sod at the ditch-side, and spring-leaves and shock-absorbers had become negligible before speed such

as theirs. That upward leap of the flying car, combined with her own instinctive and galvanic movement, served to send her body catapulting high in the air, where it described a broken arc not unlike an equestrian tumbler attempting a deliberate and measured somersault, and then fell huddled across the barb-wires of the road-fence, from which it rebounded like a body falling into a fireman's net, and lay face downward on the dust-covered grass.

But the car itself did not stop. Its driver, held closely in place by the wheel, remained where he sat as the engined monster of steel plunged through the wire fencing, leaped to the cliff-edge, and from there out into space, where it turned in one leisurely half-circle before falling top-down into the gravelly shallows of the lake.

. . . . . .

Torrie lay for what seemed a long time with her face pressed down against the dusty grass, stunned into indifferency, without even the desire for movement. Then consciousness came back to her, and with it a memory of undefined catastrophe, and with that again a nauseous weakness of the body which she had to fight against. Then her thoughts grew clearer and she sat up. After that she found not even a shadow of doubt with which to console her shaken mind. *He must have been killed!*

She crawled along the dry grass to the cliff-edge, painfully and slowly, for the barbs of the wire-fencing on which she had been thrown, penetrating several thicknesses of clothing, had torn her leg just above the knee. At the lip of the cliff she lay stretched out, face down, studying the monstrous sight of the over-turned car, bewilderingly uncouth and complicated in that attitude of visceral betrayals, lying in at least three feet of lake-water. He was dead. There could be no doubt of that. Donnie Eastman was dead.

She fought back a momentary feeling of faintness as

she edged away from the cliff. Then, with a guilty look back along the road, and with her teeth still chattering, she tore away a portion of her underskirt and with it bound up her cut and bleeding knee. Then, still watching the road, she crept eastward along the inner fence-line, passing through a stretch of woodland, skirting the rail-fence of an orchard, and losing herself again in a field of rustling corn much higher than her head. In this way she travelled until she felt her strength giving out. So she headed north again until she came to the road that ran along the lake-ridge. There she was overtaken by a red-faced woman driving a Ford car with its back seat piled high with egg-crates, a red-faced, sedate-souled, homely-mannered woman who, on noticing her limp, drew up at the roadside and inquired if she could give the girl with the white face and the tortured eyes a lift.

Torrie was glad of that lift. She explained, as they once more got under way, that she had given a bad twist to her weak ankle, and had felt that walking would be the best thing for it. She listened patiently to long and explicit directions as to more efficacious medication for the same, grateful enough to remember that every minute put still greater distance between her and the scene of a horror that was still unthinkable.

The light had begun to fade by the time she reached the broken stone gate-pillars of Pine-Brae. But on arriving at the house she found, to her great relief, that Owen was not yet back with his load of cement that was needed for the rebuilding of the root-cellar. So she repeated her story of the sprained ankle to the startled and sympathetic Uncle Abe, who promptly fell to toting linen-bandages and warm water and hot coffee to Torrie's bedroom, supplemented with a precious and never-failing bottle of liniment from that anxious-eyed old servitor's own walnut chest. But Torrie, once she was safely in bed, found herself suffering from a smart which no liniment could allay and a wound which no linen could bind

up. She lay there, anxiously watching for her husband's return, remembering that a great deal would depend on the nature of that return. She had had proof enough, in the past, of the incredible rapidity with which news could travel up and down the entire lake shore, by what was known as "moccasin telegraph." She knew that before another day had passed, perhaps even before another day had dawned, newspapers would appear with their printed recountal of what had happened at Death's Curve. Already, she surmised, the telegraph wires were busy with their first unorganized details of the case. It would be easy enough, she remembered, to identify both the car and the body. And Owen would know that Donnie Eastman had been in Canada, had been in the neighbourhood.

He would know, she acknowledged; but how much would he know? There was no material evidence to connect her in person with the accident, for surely, in the end, it would be accepted as an accident. It depended solely on the way in which she continued to play out her part. And luck, so far, had favoured her.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Storrow returned to the house. That alone was a somewhat disquieting occurrence. He came quietly, moving about the outer rooms with what seemed the listlessness of a very weary man. Torrie, lifting her head from the pillow, could hear him ask for her, just as she could hear Uncle Abe's excited and somewhat amplified description of the injured ankle. This was followed by a silence, a fortifying and yet a disquieting silence, a silence that might mean anything. A minute later Torrie's room-door was pushed open and Storrow stepped inside.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, very quietly, coming to a stop in the centre of the darkened room.

Still again, and with a coldness of tone which she could not fight back, she repeated the story of the turned ankle.

"Where did this happen?" asked her husband.

"A little way up the Ridge Road," she told him.

"How did you get back to Pine-Brae?" was his next question.

"I was given a ride by a farmer's wife in a Ford car," she told him. He stood silent for a moment or two.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he finally asked.

"No," she replied, matching the iciness of his voice with the iciness of her own. "Uncle Abe has brought me everything I need."

He seemed on the point of saying something, but on second thought preferred remaining silent. He turned and stepped out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Torrie did not sleep that night. He knew. She felt sure that he knew. So shaken did she feel in body and mind that she remained in bed for the rest of the week, brooding in silence over what she was secretly longing to ventilate by open speech. But nothing more was said, during all her period of recuperation, by Storrow when he came regularly but briefly to inquire after her progress. Nor was anything said when she had emerged from her room and once more projected herself into the placidly moving life of Pine-Brae.

Torrie and Storrow were in daily contact, spending, in fact, many hours of each day together. Yet they were not together. Between them, always, there loomed a wall of reticence as solid as concrete. Each went about armoured in steely reservations, oppressed not only by a sense of suspended action but also by the consciousness of covert and silent scrutiny. This, to Torrie, became almost unendurable. She would have preferred open contention and quarrelling to any such false calm of waiting and watching. But it was not in her power to end it.

So seeing that it was not to be ended, as the weeks dragged by, she achieved a belated and somewhat desperate decision to make the best of it. Sometimes she

even ventured out into the open and joined Storrow in his farm-work, fretted by a perverse inclination to be near him, as though finding in that physical propinquity some atonement for an inner estrangement which they could no longer hope to heal. One cool autumn morning when the sun fell clear and flat on their southern-sloping peach-orchard she joined him in the long aisles of green and wine-red branches weighed down with their fruit, globes of down-covered yellow and pink, faintly aromatic, which she took a delight in breaking away from their stems.

"These Crawfords are too small and scabby," he complained.

"But look at that basketful with the sun on them," she said, with the uncritical joy of the city-bred in partaking of the providence of nature. "They are *lovely.*"

But her husband shook his head.

"They'll only sell as seconds. This orchard wasn't sprayed last spring, and it's run to wood. A peach orchard doesn't last long, anyway. It's a question whether I'd better not clear it away next year."

"Next year," she repeated, squatting down on the ground beside the basket of peaches. She sat staring along the narrow aisle of green and wine-red foliage, staring with unseeing eyes off into the distance.

"Aren't they worth saving?" she asked out of the silence that had fallen over them both.

"It's too late," he replied as he moved his ladder to another side of the tree. Yet their eyes met as he stood arrested in sudden thought. For to each of them, apparently, had come the quick impression of something symbolic in that statement.

It was a week later that Torrie returned to Pine-Brae one afternoon with the mail, an unusual touch of colour on the faint hollow of the cheeks from which the midsummer tan was beginning to fade. Storrow, who had joined her in becoming an adept at reading any accidental

signs that might flash through their silences, was not long in discovering that something out-of-the-way had happened. The exact nature of this, however, was not made known by Torrie until towards the end of their evening meal.

"I've just had a letter from Herman Krassler," she offhandedly announced, after a somewhat prolonged period of speechlessness.

"I thought so," he admitted, as their eyes met. And so established was her Indian Summer of silent timidities that her colour deepened even in the face of her careless reaching out for a cigarette and her equally careless movement as she struck a match and slowly inhaled and exhaled a thin cloud of smoke.

"What made you think so?" she asked, as impersonally as she could.

"He's about the last of the — of the interested ones who remain," was her husband's reply, not without its touch of latent bitterness. And again her colour deepened. But this did not frighten her away from the subject in hand.

"Krassler," she went on with a quiet resolution which brought a minute quaver to her otherwise well-controlled voice, "writes that he has a part waiting for me."

Storrow did not look up at her.

"He always has a part waiting for you, hasn't he?" he demanded. Yet a moment later he bore the appearance of a man who regretted what he had said. And Torrie herself did not choose to reply to that question.

"I think I ought to take it," she said, instead.

"Why?" asked her husband, not altogether deceived by the note of hesitancy she had succeeded in throwing into that statement.

"Because things can't keep on like this," she announced, meeting Storrow's gaze with a sudden flash of audacity.

"They won't," he told her.

"Why won't they?" she asked. Her face looked fatigued, and touched with age. He realized, as he stared at her, that she was no longer a girl, but a woman who must have explored life to its heights and its depths.

"Because we can't let them," he said, with his own face shadowed as what seemed the hopelessness of the situation reasserted itself.

"That's why I think it would be so much better if I took this part when I've the chance," she explained, once more completely mistress of herself. "It's only for eight or nine weeks, apparently, until Orris Ormonde can get back from Europe in time to take it over. And eight or nine weeks like that ought to give us a chance of getting things back into perspective. Don't you think that I'm right?"

He did not answer her, for he was busy, at the moment, trying to picture what Pine-Brae would be like without her. And his heart sank, in spite of himself, at the prospect of what lay before him. Yet it was inevitable, inescapable. Torrie, he knew, had already come to her decision. He just as clearly saw, too, that her euphuism as to its being merely a temporary absence was grimly akin to the blindfolding of two unfortunates about to face the firing-squad. It would be forever. He knew it, and she knew it; yet each of them remained too cowardly to admit it, too weak to face it in its bald and unqualified ugliness.

"You'd surely go back to New York for the winter months?" she was asking.

He had never thought of that. But thought was being suddenly and sternly forced into unexplored channels.

"Yes, I think I'd go back for the winter months," he asserted. And it was her turn to be secretly harassed by the look of age and unhappiness on the other's face.

"Then that makes everything simple enough," she announced, almost with triumph. "I've always hated to think of you as alone up here."

"Then you have thought about it?" he asked, very quietly. Still again the faint tinge of colour flowed into her cheeks, but the obligation to answer his question seemed to vanish with the advent of Uncle Abe, who had come to clear the table. Both Torrie and Storrow, however, knew that the matter had been settled.

She set about her packing methodically and calmly, grateful for the liberty of movement which her husband's pretence at preoccupation with the field-work was giving her. Yet it was a process which prolonged itself into a matter of several days, ably as the lachrymose old Uncle Abe came to her help with flat-iron and washboard and polishing-brush. They were strange days of silences and repressed emotions and trivialities which had the trick of assuming prodigious and disturbing significances.

"Ah rakon you'll be totin' that houn' dawg along wif you, Mis' Torrie?" Uncle Abe asked with an audible sniffle as Skookum, sensing some untoward change, whined and whimpered about the shadowy living-room.

"No; I'll not take Skookum," said Torrie, after a moment or two of solemn thought. She called the pup to her and bent down to caress the nervous and pointed nose. "Poor old Skookum," she said again and again. Then she stood up and looked out over the lake and again stared down at the animal with his nozzle against her leather-shod ankle. "I wonder if he will remember me?"

"He shore will, Mis' Torrie," was Uncle Abe's doggedly valiant retort. "And Ah raikon we all shore will!"

The day for her departure came with a steady southeast wind, unusually mild for that time of the year. It left the clay road to the county-seat muddy and deep-rutted, so that Storrow, as he drove the farm-team hitched to the covered fruit-wagon with Torrie's trunks piled high behind them, found excuse enough for his silences

in the attention which he had to give to his driving. And he was anxious that the wait at the railway-station should be as short as it could be managed with safety.

Thanks to the rain and the heavy roads, that long-dreaded wait proved to be mercifully brief. By the time Storrow had bought tickets and checked trunks and returned from making sure that his team was safely tied, the long whistle of the incoming express could be heard through the quietly falling rain.

Torrie's face blanched. She looked up at her husband, with the set jaw-muscles of his lean face showing through the tanned and wind-roughened face, and her lip quivered.

"Oh, Owen," she said, foolishly, as her tears began to flow.

"It's all right," he assured her, scarcely knowing what he was saying. "It's all right."

He carried her two hand-bags to the edge of the wet platform. She followed him, her face contorted with misery.

"We *can't!*" she suddenly cried out. "We can't go this way — we can't!"

He imagined, for one weak moment, that she had relented of all her purpose, that the thought of flight was proving too much for her. And then he remembered. He remembered that it was inevitable, and that it was for ever.

"Kiss me, Owen," Torrie was whispering to him, with upturned face, for the dripping train had come to a stop beside them and a porter had thrown open the Pullman end-door. "Kiss me!"

He took her suddenly and almost fiercely in his arms and kissed her. He kissed her tenderly, with a tightening of the throat which made it hard for him to breathe. He heard the conductor's impersonally yodelled "All-aboard" and saw the coloured porter lift the two hand-bags into the car after her. He saw the train get under

way, the last car pass the platform, the early lit tail-lights grow misty and vanish in the falling rain. When he turned slowly about and splashed through mud and water to where his team stood waiting, steaming in the wet air, he carried on his lips a taste of brine, from the lips he had loved and never in all his life would kiss again.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

STORROW, when he returned to New York two months later, went back to the city with the feeling that he was re-entering an arena. He went back oppressed by a sense of defeat, defeat which in some way must be converted into victory.

Those intervening weeks at Pine-Brae, after Torrie's departure, had been anything but happy weeks. The place seemed too permeated with her presence, too haunted with unexpectedly disturbing memories. He did what he could to purge it of these, by quietly yet studiously removing every possible trace of her, from the over-run kid-slippers which Skookum delighted in carrying into the open to the accordion-pleated silk underskirt, worn through at the edges, which still hung behind her bedroom door. But there were less material things which could not be hidden away, aromas and associations and reminiscences which reached out like unseen hands to draw him aside to that past on which he had determined to turn his back. And the loneliness of the old house, as the days grew shorter and the south-east winds brought the waves pounding mournfully and continually against the lake cliffs, became unendurable. So Storrow set about making his arrangements for departure. These kept him busy for a fortnight made doubly miserable by alternating snow and rain and wind, so that when he finally landed in New York, still basking under a belated stretch of warm and balmy sunlight, it seemed like a migration into a tumultuous but an infinitely merrier world.

Nor did Storrow return without a definitely mapped outline of conduct. He had known too much of drift-

ing. For too long he had stood merely marking time. He found himself possessed by a second wind of ambition, an impatience to assert himself, a hunger to re-enter that world from which circumstances not of his own choosing seemed to have elbowed him. To this end he had consulted his over-pompous Park Committee in the matter of the long-deferred statue of Tecumseh, pointing out to them his decision that an exedra with a decorative frieze, surmounted by a figure in heroic size, would be more effective than the earlier considered life-size figure of the Chieftain on a block of Scotch granite. It was only after much argument, and much consultation over costs and specifications and sketch-models, that the newer and more ambitious plan was agreed to, although that agreement came with a number of more or less absurd qualifications which he accepted and interpreted as a mere sop to his directors' personal dignity. But when he returned to the city, and to the old Twenty-Fourth Street studio which he had decided to use now merely as a workroom, he began to nurse the relieving knowledge of elaborate and engrossing tasks ahead of him.

He had need for this. He felt a hunger for order after disorder, for stability after confusion. He began to see what Chester Hardy had meant by that often repeated word of "organization." And Hardy himself, on his return to the city after an autumn of secluded toil in a fellow-artist's abandoned villa at Lennox, seemed to realize the younger man's predicament. He did more than merely gather up the broken threads of friendship. He did all that lay in his power to warp Storrow back into the duly buoyed and buoyant channels of life. He entered into benevolent conspiracies with Charlotte to reenmesh her sober-eyed cousin in the activities of that upper world from which he had shown a tendency to turn away. And Storrow, swinging back with the pendulum, surrendered to these gentle propulsions. He nursed an active enough craving for the respectabilities of life, just as he had always nursed an innate distaste for that dis-

ordered province of laxness and license which is known as bohemia.

But his surrender was not as complete as it appeared. He went about, for all his pretences of preoccupation, carrying the secret conviction that the most vital issue of life had been left in the air, as grotesque and unfinished as the span of an abandoned bridge. The memory of his marriage did not trouble him so much during those first few weeks, when he knew that Torrie was out "on the road." It was not until her return to New York that the situation began to perplex him. He read the announcements that she was about to emerge as a full-fledged star in *Smoke Signals,* a new play by a new but neurotic author whom Krassler had disinterred from a hydropathic resort at Mount Clemens. Then followed a campaign of that publicity which emanates from imaginative press-agents, artfully fabricated romances of Torrie Throssel's origin and early youth, discreetly censored recountals of her past stage experiences, and fittingly picturesque descriptions of her coming rôle, of her expensive costumes, of her love for animals and her eccentric methods of study.

None of these, Storrow found to his great relief, contained any reference to her marriage. When portraits of her began to appear in theatrical weeklies and Sunday supplements, he studied these patently new photographs with great care, disturbed, as a rule, by certain changes in that only too well-known face, changes which he could not quite decipher. They merely seemed to accentuate her remoteness, just as the press-agent paragraphs, as suavely untruthful as obituaries, tended to translate her more and more into the legendary. There were times, however, when it struck him as odd that both he and Torrie should be working in the same city and yet to all intents and purposes remain as completely separated as the poles. His own days, it is true, had become more and more crowded, especially after his decision to study

architecture for a few months in one of the larger city offices, since the designing of the Tecumseh exedra had made plain his weakness in this branch of the sculptor's art. It was not, indeed, until he had begun work, at Hardy's suggestion, on a portrait-bust of Catherine Klennert that he stumbled on any direct and personal allusion to Torrie's advance.

"Watch that Throssel woman," the older actress with the absinthe-green eyes had remarked during one of her sittings, quite unconscious that the quiet-eyed artist before her stood in any way personally interested in the subject. "You'll notice the splash in three or four weeks. Krassler intends to throw her right off into deep water, just to show that a Krassler star needn't ever learn to swim!"

"Why do you call it deep water?" inquired Storrow as he went on with his work.

"Because six months can't make a show-girl into a stage star," retorted the statuesque beauty who had bloomed and faded under less auspicious planets. And her face, as she spoke, was not without a touch of resentment. "It can't be done, legitimately, even with a Krassler behind you. But in this case he's fitted his woman with one of those freak emotional parts where *delirium tremens* makes up for lack of technique. And when he throws her onto Broadway she'll probably land on her feet, the same as a cat. He's a wizard at tricking that stuff over, if you give him something pliant enough to work with. It's really ventriloquism, of course, for it's always Krassler you get, every move and word and intonation. It's merely Krassler working through some empty-headed woman who's willing to be scooped out of her own body, the same as you scoop out a Hallow-E'en pumpkin and stick your own head inside. But Krassler isn't in sight when the trick is done, so the audience sits back and accepts the new star as the real thing."

"Well, isn't she what you'd call the real thing," Stor-

row was prompted to argue, "so long as she gets her results?"

"But they're not *her* results; they're Krassler's. And when the time comes for Krassler to step out, there's nothing left but another collapsed balloon."

"Supposing, then, that Krassler keeps behind her?" suggested Storrow, with a perfunctory movement or two about his study. For his mind was very far from being on his work.

"That," retorted the absinthe-eyed woman of the world, "all depends on just how she's holding him there."

Nothing more was said on the matter, though the incident left Storrow with a good deal to think over. By the time the Klennert bust was completed and its creator had the dubious satisfaction of beholding it installed in a Fifth Avenue jeweller's window, trickily backed by a drapery of dark green velvet, Krassler's production of *Smoke Signals* was duly announced for Broadway. One day Storrow, idly watching a bill-poster as he affixed a "four-sheet" to a Sixth Avenue sign-board, found a faint thrill course through his body as he spelled out the large and gaudy letters of "Torrie Throssel." A week later he saw the same name on Broadway, picked out in luminous electric bulbs.

Then came the play itself. Storrow, after many silent and self-abortive debates, decided not to see it. But he did not remain long in doubt as to Torrie's success. The criticism of the play itself was preponderantly adverse. The acknowledgment of Torrie's personal triumph, however, was unqualified. As Katherine Klennert had predicted, the new-made star had "landed on her feet." And as the new play settled down for what promised to be a winter's run, and those friends of Storrow's who knew of his marriage sympathetically sustained their conspiracy of silence as to what had come to be regarded as a mis-step of his earlier life, the outwardly busy man who was outwardly so preoccupied

with his projected statue of Tecumseh began to feel that after all he might find it possible to sink like a mollusk beneath the tides of time and lie there, enclosed in his shell, undisturbed by the forces of an older and less tranquillized world. For reticence, perhaps quite as much racial as it was personal, was still a dominating feature of his make-up. He had become, in fact, almost morbidly averse to attention, over-sensitive to outside appraisal and opinion. And his own career began to impress him as one where it would be preferable to keep shut the cross-written pages of the past.

But twice that musty and much-thumbed book was unexpectedly opened. It happened the first time when Storrow attended the annual Fakirs' Show of the Art Students' League. As he elbowed his way through the youthful and buoyant and bubbling crowd laughing at the freaks of the improvised "Side-Show," he came face to face with Alan Vibbard, standing hand in hand with an extremely thin girl in a short skirt, in front of a cage which bore the inscription: "Maniac Marmaduke, the Wild Man of Mazatlan." Vibbard, at the moment, was laughing at the demoniacal struggles of the over-whiskered Wild Man. Then he glanced over his shoulder and saw Storrow close beside him. The pendant-jowled painter melted adroitly away through the crowd, during the next minute or two, but that unlooked-for encounter served to take the effervescing spirit of youth and gaiety out of the children of art pirouetting about a sombre-eyed young man with a prematurely shadowed face.

The second unheralded return to the past occurred late one afternoon when the light in Storrow's studio had become too uncertain for further work. A knock, so light as to seem almost timorous, had sounded on his door. Before he could answer it the door itself had opened and Torrie herself had stepped into the room. She was veiled, and muffled in heavy black furs, but he recognized her at once, even before she spoke.

"May I come in, Owen?" she asked, almost timidly. Her voice, for all its momentary quaver, struck him as deeper and fuller in tone. Through the folds of the veil her face looked thinner and whiter than before.

He placed a chair for her, but she remained standing, staring slowly about the room with its blurring lines receding into unbroken shadow. She even stopped him, with a little gesture, which seemed quite new to her, as he moved to switch on the lights.

"I can stay only a moment," she murmured, with what seemed an almost apprehensive glance back towards the still open door. Of the two, he was much the more self-possessed.

"It was kind of you to come," he said, disturbed that he was unable to make his tone anything more than perfunctory.

"I was wondering," she hesitatingly began, after the silence had lengthened abysmally between them, "if you'd have the time, later on, to do a — a bust of me, something like the Klennert bust."

It was impossible, he found, to keep from probing for some motive behind this suggestion. But the motive, if there was one, eluded him.

"That was a terribly bad bust," he averred, almost lightly, wondering just how he should phrase his refusal of her suggestion.

"No, no; I've heard only nice things about it," she protested, trying to counter a depressing consciousness of formality by a smile which was at first hesitating and then pitiful. "But perhaps you're busy with other work."

"I've got old Tecumseh to work out, if I can ever get a model who's lean and sinewy enough for what I need."

"Oh, yes; Tecumseh," she echoed, her mind obviously not on what she said. She turned away, and her hand went up to her veil. Through that veil he seemed to read on her face an odd mingling of perplexity and dis-

appointment. He himself was perplexed by some newborn shyness about her, an air of timorousness which he found hard to reconcile with his earlier memories of Torrie. Without knowing why, as he watched her, he thought of a bird with a broken wing. Her pale face coloured a little as she became conscious of his studious eyes upon her.

"Are you sorry I came?" she asked, speaking with an effort.

"Yes," he was compelled in honour to admit. "I'm sorry."

She nodded her head, as though in belated consciousness of some infinite and forgotten remoteness between them. Then she turned away. Her husband watched her as she moved slowly towards the door.

"Must you go?" he mechanically inquired.

Torrie, still without looking back at him, nodded her head. Her steps, as she walked towards the door, were slow, like the steps of a person wading through water. But she passed out into the dim-lit and many-odoured hallway without stopping or looking back. Storrow, after staring a moment at the still open door, crossed to the wall-switch and lighted the studio.

The room, with its shadowy recesses that had seemed haunted by a huddle of thin shapes and memories, became at a hand's turn a place of flat walls and uncompromisingly hard lines. His eyes wandered on to the clay-stained frame-work to which so much of that day had gone in toil. It suddenly impressed him as tragically inconsequential and foolish, this refashioning of dead Indians out of mud. It was not manly work. It was not even engrossing, though he had stood too cowardly ever to admit that over-disquieting truth to his own soul. But it helped to fill in the emptiness of life. It seemed about all that was left to him. He would go on at that sort of thing, he supposed, keeping up an appearance of contentment, buttressing up his make-believe of accom-

plishment, until the unrest in his soul burned itself out, like a lamp. For, some day, he contended, the oil that fed this flame must exhaust itself.

Storrow was still standing there, deep in thought, when he was aroused by the sound of quick and nervous footsteps crossing his floor-boards. He swung about to find himself confronted by Herman Krassler in a fur-lined Melton overcoat which merely seemed to add to his diminutiveness.

"Is Torrie here?" that unannounced intruder promptly inquired.

"She is not," Storrow just as promptly retorted.

"Has she been here?"

"Why?"

This man, Storrow remembered, was his enemy, his one remaining enemy. In that thin and nervously strung body with its rat-like audacity merging on insolence he could behold personified those more sordid and selfish forces which were walling his wife off in a world of her own. Always, to Storrow, he had remained a sinister back-ground figure, awaiting the chance which he had known would some day be his. And now, in a way, he had triumphed. His patience had been rewarded.

"Because it's rather important," was Krassler's answer to the other's interrogative rebuff.

"To whom?" demanded Storrow, as he remembered the futile physical violence with which he had met other enemies, enemies strangely different to this small and rat-like body with the extraordinary light in its deep-set eyes. And much as he longed to clear the air with some purging and relieving outburst of passion, Storrow found it impossible to wring any consolation from the thought of physical assault on anything so defenceless.

"To all of us," retorted Krassler.

"What do you want, anyway?" challenged the other, a little out of control, conscious, even in his anger, that it was the smaller man's power and the fortitude born

of this power which was inflaming him to opposition.

"I want to talk about Torrie," he said with a second quiet yet quickly appraising stare at the other man.

"I hope it will be a brief talk," retorted Storrow.

"That all depends on you," announced Krassler, still cool in the face of the younger man's hostility.

"Then we can regard it as ended, right now," was Storrow's prompt ultimatum.

"That would be welcome enough to me, but unfortunately it doesn't bring us to any solution of our problem."

"I wasn't aware that we had one in common."

"But we have."

"What is it?"

"Torrie."

It was Storrow's turn to renew his appraisal of the man confronting him. In that alert and finely wrinkled face with the quick glance which contradicted the look of weariness about the femininely soft eyes he detected a courage and directness which he was reluctantly compelled to respect. Krassler, he knew, had the singleness of will which spelt success, which carried him over every obstacle to the end in view. And the man who saw his far-off goal and struggled towards it, without digression or diversion, was always to be envied.

"And what is your interest in Torrie?" Storrow demanded.

"I am her manager," retorted Krassler.

"Well, I am her husband," just as crisply retorted the other.

"Nominally, but not actually," corrected Krassler.

"Is that your problem?"

Krassler did not wince, but it took him a moment or two to organize his answer to that over-curt question.

"Torrie is my star. I've landed her on Broadway with a success. If she's handled right she can repeat that success season by season, as long as she wants to call

herself an actress. That means her name and personality have taken on a definite commercial value."

"I know all that."

"Then you also know that any personal entanglement, anything that stands unsavoury and sordid to her public, is going to effect her name and her future."

"Do you regard marriage as an entanglement?"

"In this case, I do," was Krassler's prompt reply.

"Then what do you propose?"

"I suggest that you give Torrie a divorce."

Still again Storrow studied the slight and nervous-bodied man in front of him. And still again he yielded reluctant tribute to his enemy's audacity.

"And what good would that do either Torrie or me?" he demanded, slightly amazed at the coolness with which he could discuss a problem once painful and still eminently personal.

"It would leave Torrie unhampered, to go on with her work."

"I can't see that being married has hampered her any in her work." He remembered, at the moment, what Chester Hardy had once said about marriage: that it naturally closed a number of doors, but that divorce closed and locked a much greater number.

"Your failure to realize a situation doesn't correct it," Krassler was saying. "I repeat that that situation exists. And as Torrie comes to stand more and more prominently before the public the more that situation will become a drag on her."

"You mean that *I* am the drag!"

"I prefer not expressing it in that particular manner," Krassler explained with a coolness that was not without its barb.

"But that's about what you mean?"

"That depends very much on the course of action which you propose to follow!"

"But I propose to follow no course of action," was

Storrow's prompt announcement. Krassler shook his head, almost impatiently.

"That, under the circumstances, is not quite possible. You've either got to approve of such a move, or oppose it."

"On the contrary, I decline even to bring it into existence."

"That is equally impossible."

"What makes it impossible?"

"The fact that your wife is already in possession of sufficient evidence to obtain the end I've spoken of."

"Do you mean evidence against me?"

"Yes!"

"What kind of evidence?"

"I understand that you were detected by the necessary witness in a situation necessarily compromising, a little over a year ago, in"—

"Evidence against me?" repeated the astonished Storrow.

"In the room," pursued Krassler with a carefully maintained matter-of-factness, "of a Broadway chorus-girl known as Pannie Atwill."

Storrow's thoughts flew back to the situation which Krassler's words had so suddenly recalled. He remembered the scene and Mattie Crowder's calm-eyed inspection of it.

"But that situation was an innocent one, absolutely and entirely innocent," he explained, nettled to find himself on the defensive.

"It would not be accepted as innocent by any open-minded judge of the supreme court," was Krassler's impersonal retort. It took an effort, on Storrow's part, to keep himself under control.

"Has Torrie ever expressed a willingness to make use of that incident?" he demanded.

"She may be compelled to," was Krassler's non-committal retort.

"But is she willing to?"

"She realizes that things can't possibly go on as they are," was the other's answer.

"And you intend to use this," began Storrow.

"I don't think you will be stupid enough to make that necessary," Krassler told him. But Storrow, the next moment, had swung about on him.

"It isn't a matter of stupidity. It's a matter of decency. And, if I'm not mistaken, the stupidity is on your side. No matter what happened in connection with this Pannie Atwill affair you've mentioned, Torrie knew of that affair at the time, was a witness to it, and openly condoned it by living with me for nearly a year. And as I remember it the condoning of any such offence exempts it from action for divorce."

Krassler, still shrewd-eyed and thoughtful, shrugged a diffident shoulder.

"I'm neither a judge nor a lawyer. But if what you say is true it remains equally true that if Torrie wants to sacrifice a half-year out of her work she can go to Nevada and obtain her decree there on the grounds of cruelty and non-support. But that's something which you both ought to fight shy of."

Storrow met the other man's eye, still marked by an absence of open combativeness.

"Why are you so interested in all this?" he suddenly demanded.

"Because, as I've already pointed out, I happen to be Torrie Throssel's manager. And I want to see her free to win over the public that she's waiting to win over."

Storrow's gesture was one of impatience. Then a new thought came to him.

"Does Torrie intend to marry another man?" he demanded.

"I've never heard her express such an intention," was Krassler's cool-noted reply.

"Do *you* intend to marry her?" asked Storrow, inspecting his small-bodied enemy.

Krassler laughed.

"Thanking you, I have quite troubles enough as her manager," he said.

"But you do intend to see that she secures a divorce?" demanded Storrow, once more amazed at the coolness with which he could fence over a theme so intimate and at the same time so odious.

"Since you've put it that way," was the quiet response, "I do intend seeing that she gets a divorce."

"And you came here for the purpose of obtaining my co-operation in an action which, under the circumstances, must be a collusary one?"

"Not necessarily. I came here more to find out what your attitude was. Whether you oppose any such action, or whether you agree to it, hasn't very much bearing on the case. In either event, you see, it will go on exactly the same."

"Who says so?"

"I say so."

"Then what I happen to say couldn't be of much consequence?"

"Not unless you're big enough to feel the appropriateness of making things as easy as possible for Torrie," was Krassler's slowly enunciated reply.

"Aren't you proving yourself sufficiently expert at that?" was Storrow's equally deliberate demand. But that taunt altogether failed to bring any answering taunt from the man whom he had regarded so long as his enemy. Storrow, indeed, was surprised to see a look of pathos in the deep-set Hebraic eyes of the face confronting him. Yet it was a look that came and went again in a moment's time.

"Whatever I'm doing," retorted Krassler with his first parade of open anger, "isn't being done for my own

selfish satisfaction. I'm not thinking about myself. I'm not posing as a martyr. And what's more, I'm not trying to straddle two horses at once. I'm thinking of a woman's future, the future she's got to fight for. What's more, I'm banking everything I've got on that future. I'm banking more than money on it — and I'm not worrying about what I'm going to win or lose. But if you haven't manhood enough to leave this girl free to put up the fight she's got to put up, then I'm glad to find out how we stand, so that I can act accordingly."

Storrow's first impression, at this almost theatrical outburst, was a suspicion of being manipulated by an adroit and accomplished juggler in emotional values, a feeling that he was being goaded into an opposition which must later on serve to extenuate unsavoury extremes. But as the force of what his diminutive enemy had said came fully home to him this initial suspicion was submerged by an answering wave of anger, quick and uncontrolled.

"Well, I'll tell you what I have manhood enough for," he cried out, unconscious of the picture of a patient-eyed little man with a soul of fire and a swarthy and shrunken face as haggard as a lost and hungry dog's in front of him. "I've manhood enough not to see my name dragged through the mire by a bunch of theatrical parasites and an exploiter of women like you. The divorce court may be a joke in your circle, but it's not in mine. And since you've had the effrontery to announce that you're going to put me through it about the same as you'd put a clown through a paper hoop, I'm going to announce to you right here and now that I intend to fight you, tooth and nail! I'll fight you — and I'll fight you to the last ditch!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

IF Storrow wrung any satisfaction out of his open declaration of opposition to Krassler, that satisfaction was not an enduring one. He realized, as he thought things over, that his words had been big and that his ability to translate them into action was limited. And as Krassler himself, apparently sharing in that realization, withdrew with the promptness of a lawyer's clerk who has served his subpoena, Storrow was not without the disturbing consciousness of beholding what had seemed a highly dramatic situation wither away into nothingness.

Yet there were other things which disturbed him even more. One of these was the discovery that Pannie Atwill might still again appear in the drama of his life, a painted Columbine with the dignifying attributes of a Greek Chorus. It seemed, on the whole, expedient that he should see Pannie. So without further loss of time he began making inquiries and soon found that she was holding forth in a musical-comedy entitled *The Princess of Pecos,* recognized as one of the Broadway successes of the season.

Storrow, when he applied at the stage-entrance of her theatre, found Pannie too preoccupied with costume and make-up to waste valuable time in talk.

"Say, it'd be like sleepin' in a nest o' copperheads, tryin' to talk private in this bunch o' bone-heads," Pannie promptly informed him. "Come round after the show and steer me over to Barney's, where we can sit in comfort. And if you've gotta kill time, why don't you get a look in at this piece? Skip round front and grab a seat

while you can, for it's a riot, all right. And keep your eye peeled for that colour-scheme o' mine at the end of the second act, for the ribs round here have been knockin' my lonjery-tints and I want the word of a gink who's tried and true!"

Storrow, at the box-office of *The Princess of Pecos,* had the good luck to obtain a solitary "turn-in." He sat through the play patiently and a little bewildered, puzzled by the manner in which the audience about him responded to that stridulous and over-driven entertainment. It was not a cheap audience. If anything, it was an over-decorous one. It impressed Storrow as being typically American in its amiability and personal kindliness, in its ability to react promptly and whole-heartedly to the stimuli of the present, in its keen and amazingly simple powers of vision, in its preoccupied forbearance of shallowness and shoddiness, and in that general drowsy insomnia of the soul, half-awake, half-asleep, with which the over-tensioned citizen of an over-tensioned city surrenders to his amusements. The play itself was established on old and well-approved lines, its one novelty, as far as Storrow could see, being its unduly accelerated *tempo,* where scene and song and movement swept on, before the startled eye could adjust itself to the perspectives of criticism. He was out of tune with its spirit and intent, so that instead of amusing him it merely benumbed him. He was glad enough when it was over.

Yet he had to wait longer than he had expected beside that dimly lighted stage-entrance which impressed him as ridiculously dingy and sordid in comparison with the same theatre's incandescent foyer grandeurs. Stamped by the same ironic dinginess, he noticed, were the chorus-girls who began to emerge from that door, hurrying and preoccupied girls with tired faces and militantly unseeing eyes, with the odour of cosmetics still about them. Stage singers and dancers drifted past him, all the sparkle and daintiness and devil-may-careness quite gone from them,

for now they were serious-minded working people with the serious enough business of the day completed. They were merely toilers in the fields of gladness, sombrely intent on their escape from that frugal harvesting of laughter and dolorously in need of a meal and a pillow under their heads.

In the later and more leizurely stragglers from the stage door, it is true, Storrow found an increasing gaiety of apparel and intent, since these queenlier idlers were the pink slaves of that once dominating tradition which held that "the show girl"— as she was at that time denominated — always "brought money into the house," and the more conspicuous she stood in the night-life of Broadway the more valuable she could hold herself to the management which made a pretence of controlling her movements. It was one of these queenlier personages who was bunted unceremoniously aside as Pannie Atwill dodged out through the door.

"Pawdon *me!*" she said with mock deference as she hopped forward and slipped an arm through Storrow's. She was busy buttoning up her coat and tugging on her gloves as they emerged from the dark alleyway into the side-street.

"I guess you're sore, after pawin' the asphelt this long," she said by way of explanation. "But I had me laundry to get ready and a she-hokum in there was tryin' to crab my Wendies. So let's beat it to Barney's before the fairy-rings get swamped in Bock!"

Once duly installed at Barney's, at a table as secluded as could be found in that night-blooming Sirius of a Rathskeller, Pannie gave her undivided attention to a Golden Buck Rabbit and a thrice-filled stein of Pilsner. Then, with an honest appetite honestly appeased, she became disposed to entertain any more abstract problem which might be presented to her. Storrow noticed, as he explained Krassler's visit to him, that Pannie had taken pains to remove the heavy make-up which had dis-

figured her face as he had seen it earlier in the evening. He was glad of this, for that face as he had first beheld it, with its great blotches of carmine spread along either cheek-bone, its geranium-painted lips and beaded lashes and azured eye-lids, had impressed him as a face disturbingly clown-like to be called into conference over a problem very far removed from jocularity. Even now, with its fatigued eyes and its evidences of having been well scrubbed with cold-cream, it seemed incongruously pert and frivolous for insinuating into the solemnest intimacies of his life. But Pannie's face was dignified enough as the man across the table explained to her the intent and purport of Krassler's ultimatum.

"Poor little kyke!" she said with ruminative eyes, when Storrow had finished.

"Then you're with Krassler in this?" demanded Storrow, astonished by that unlooked for expression of sympathy with his enemy.

"Now, Buddy, don't get your war-bonnet on," Pannie warned him. "I didn't say I was for Krassler. The only person I'm for, in this, is Torrie. And I'm for her strong. But I do say I'm sorry for the kyke, the same as I'd be sorry for any gink who's only gettin' somebody else's empty oyster-shell! He's only gettin' an oyster-shell, but Krassler's puttin' one over on all of us by takin' that shell and carvin' it into a Baralong pearl."

"I don't quite understand what you mean by that," Storrow was compelled to admit.

"Then I'll wise you up," rejoined Pannie. "That little guy's a genius, at his own special line o' work. All he wants is a woman with a voice and a face that won't warp the plush off the balcony-rail. He can take her and work with her and breathe the breath o' life into her, the same as that old Greek boob did with his Galatea dame with the stony midriff. That's what he's doin' with Torrie, or with all that's left of Torrie. For you can't side-step the fact, Capt'n Kidd, that it was you who

scooped out the oyster of Torrie's life. I guess you got about all she had to give. Perhaps it didn't altogether agree with your Little Mary, bein' more used to the frigid eats of the native Esquimau. But that ain't exactly the problem we're here to beef about. What we're limekiln-clubbin' over is Krassler. And as I lamp the whole thing, by and large, Krassler's the only man who can keep Torrie inside the track-rail. For the only way that girl's goin' to be happy now is in her work. That's all that can keep her goin'. And it ain't so much, remember, when there's nothin' behind it. But it's better than subsidin' on the toboggan and hittin' the grade where the down-and-outers hand the roundsman a weekly rake-off for gettin' colour-blind when the green-lights pass on the wink to the red. That's something you've gotta face, whether it hurts the enamel or not. Torrie's got her good points. And she's also got her weak ones. And one o' them is this," continued Pannie, with a clink of her metal-ringed finger against the glass beside her. "With Krassler she'll keep away from that, because she's gotta keep away from it. She's just an engine, to Krassler. And he won't stand for any loose-jointed work in that engine. He'll want her to run like a Rolls-Royce — and what's more, he'll make her. He knows you can't star with a burned-up larnyx, any more'n you can nurse a hang-over and emote your way through that heavy stuff. He can put hobbles and blinders on her and hold her through her work. But he's gotta hold her still closer'n that. He's gotta know he's in control, and she's gotta know he's in control. And the only way he can do that, as I dope it out, is to be something more than her manager!"

Storrow's questioning eyes stared into the audacious and slightly combative eyes of the pert-faced girl confronting him.

"You — you don't mean that he's got to marry her?" asked the man with the slowly hardening face.

"That, Capt'n Kidd, is exactly what I mean. He's gotta marry her. He's gotta put the neck-yoke under her tossin' mane and be able to say which turn comes next."

"But he doesn't even intend a move like that," cried the unhappy and altogether bewildered Storrow. Pannie's lip curled with a scorn which, for all its quickness, still held a touch of kindliness.

"You poor muddle-lamped mutt you, can't you see that Krassler's been crazy about that girl from the first crack out o' the box? Can't you see how he's stood off to one side and waited for her about the same as a last year's bird's nest waits for the lady-wren to hop back into the neighbourhood? He's let her try out her wings, and fight the wind, and lose a feather or two, and even come down in a nose-dive with all the song knocked out of her. But he's always been there, waitin', just waitin'. With you, kiddo, it's different. You had a run for your money. And you're one o' those clean-mapped Brummels that the unthinkin' female of the species seems to have a weakness for, mistakin' your quietness for coldness and dreamin' it would be some jinks to thaw you out. I ain't so sure that I wouldn't like to show you what a grand little thawer I am myself, if I could only get you woke up once. No, son, don't send for the reserves. You're still safe. I ain't she-vampin' any Canucks these days without a little encouragement — and you've never even given me a pinch-hitter's openin'. But in spite of all that, Capt'n Kidd, I ain't against you. I'm for you, strong. But I'm just a little stronger for Torrie. And if she's got a chanct to make harbour, I'm goin' to be the busy little buntin' tug to help warp her in. If I've gotta, I'm goin' to testify to every eagle-eyed beak on the bench that you was fond and foolish, that night when the only longin' you had was a longin' for ice-water and solitood. It'll sure nail me down as a charter member of the Ananias Club, but I've got the gumption to see it through

because I've got the hunch it's the only way that's left to straighten out Torrie's life. And now I want another pint o' Pilsner, for I've talked until I've got a throat like a limekiln!"

Storrow sat staring at the pert-eyed child of the chorus who had gone pirouetting through his close-shuttered house of life, amazed at her audacity, yet even more amazed at what that audacity had revealed to him. It would take time, he knew, to reassemble and reorganize what had been thrown into such sudden riot.

"And there's another point I want 'o put into your ear," continued the cool-eyed Pannie. "Torrie's too new at this stage game, of course, to take a tumble to when the old-handers behind her are crabbin' her points. And stage-work, when you once get to know it, is sure war to the knife. Torrie, you see, is still so busy puttin' over her part she can't keep an eye peeled for the wolfers she has to work with. But just let little Hermie spot one o' those old-timers tryin' to shoulder off into the backdrop, or wiggle so much as a finger on one of his star's big lines, or cut a laugh short or cross in on a scene and flatten the punch out of her picture — just let the eagle-eyed Hermie lamp any o' those dodges and see him come down on 'em like a ton o' bricks. Does he watch her? Say, he watches that woman the same as a she-tiger watches her offspring!"

But Storrow was not interested in the tricks of dramatic rivalry. He was more interested in the suddenly snarled-up drama of his own existence.

"Then it's all settled on and decided," he asked as Pannie put down her glass, "that I'm to be the victim of a collusive divorce, whether I want it or not, whether I approve or disapprove of entering into conspiracies?"

Pannie nodded her head.

"Yes; you're *it*," she calmly acknowledged. "You're the beetle on the big pin. And wrigglin' won't do anything more'n give you an extra pain in your little in-

nards. But since you mention it, son, why're you so set against givin' Torrie her freedom?"

"I'll answer that question by asking another," was Storrow's retort. "Can any such action as that be taken in a city like this without having the whole sordid mess dragged through the newspapers? Can a woman who's become a Broadway star obtain a divorce without having every detail of it bandied about?"

"No, Cap'n Kidd, you can't. You can't cook up a case like this and then primp up your kisser and say you want the papers sealed. All you can do is put the soft pedal on by havin' the case unopposed. And even then they'll sure get it into big type, for the stars is what the rubes want 'o sit up nights readin' about. It'll be bandied, all right."

The stricken look that crept into his eyes at the same time that a deeper colour swept up over his face did not escape her. She studied her half-empty beer-glass for a full minute before speaking again.

"This doesn't listen like painless dentistry, I know. And Pannie isn't goin' to pull that old stuff about it hurtin' poppa more'n it hurts little Willie. But it's one o' the times when plain talk is the only kind that's goin' to do any good. And if I've had to hand you out something that's goin' to give you a cramp in your think-tank, don't run away with the idear I'm not for you, kid!"

Storrow continued to brood over what Pannie had said as he took her home to her rooming-house and left her at that side-street rookery which stood as a sort of ironic monument to her respectability. Even after he had turned back into Broadway, and without being conscious of either time or direction moved northward with the thinning tide of midnight stragglers, he continued to review the situation which Pannie had revealed to him.

It had been a tangled skein, he admitted as he crossed Columbus Circle and surrendered to the silent invitation of the Park and its appeasing wintry solitudes, a welter

of bright threads and dark. It now seemed without purpose, unless one were willing to dignify as purpose a constant and unreasoning hunger for happiness. Yet all the world wanted to be happy, he contended as he strode on, following the curving driveway deeper into those midnight solitudes until the twin rows of lamps and the stately elms reminded him that he had reached The Mall. And he had only done what all the world did.

He stopped, in the midst of that night as mild as a night in May, and stared up at the stars that hung above the tangled lacery of the elm-tops. Then he looked eastward and westward, towards Fifth Avenue and Eighth, from which even now the subdued noises of the city stole to him. But they came musically, moderated and modulated by distance. And that, he told himself as he paced the whispering quietness of The Mall, is what life must be: an achieved and guarded tranquillity in the midst of tumult.

Then the stronger aura of light above Broadway caused him to think of Torrie again. And he remembered that she too had been hungry for happiness — had been overhungry for happiness, he amended, and he found in that new phrase a new avenue for speculation. Yet invariably and inevitably that avenue led back to himself. He too, in his over-eagerness, had thought only of himself, was still thinking only of himself, of the atom which counted so little in the infinitudes of time.

Most men, when confronted by conditions such as his, would have sought the companionship and counsel of their kind. But Storrow, in this respect, stood different to most men. He nursed both the instincts and the habits of the confirmed *solitaire,* the pagan-like inclination for solitude during his moments of stress. And having endured his uncompanioned travail, he found the whelps of peace once more nosing against his body. In the midst of his darkness came light. That relieving delivery

failed to take on any touch of high emotional colouring. It was marked by no sudden and vast transformation. But he was conscious of a change, a clarifying and releasing change, mystified as he remained as to its source and its inspiration. Somewhere deep down in his heart, as the first inkling of this change crept over him, a small glimmer of warmth seemed to return to life. It was the light, he told his own slightly bewildered soul, which no man must let go entirely out. He was confronted by ignominy, and he must save himself from it. Above everything else he must guard and redeem his own self-respect. And as he once more took thought of his own infinitesimally small and struggling *ego,* confronted by forces it could never overcome, he grew into a comprehension of the timeless paradox that he who gives, receives. It was Torrie, now, that he had to think of. He could make the only sacrifice that was left him to make. He would give Torrie her divorce.

He knew well enough what this meant. It meant nothing spectacular or heroic, no gathering of serried spear-points into his own breast. But he would have to leave New York, leave it for good, leave it so Torrie could have that field for her own. In going, he could carry away with him the thought that he had done it for her own good. He would at least have that to sustain him.

Yet his decision brought with it a subsidiary impulse which he found hard to understand. It left him with a keen yet half-impersonal desire to see Torrie again, a feeling, now that he had made sure in his own mind that he was going back to Canada, not unlike the longing which one has for a farewell glimpse of the once beloved dead. He could go to her now, he knew, without trepidation, almost without regret. Then he stopped short, with a question which brought a bitter-sweet pang to his body. Supposing, even yet, and in the face of everything — supposing, should that meeting prove auspicious, Torrie

might startle him with the claim that it was not too late, that life began anew with every new day, that they too might still — But he smothered the thought as a woodsman smothers the coals which if unguarded might grow into a conflagration.

Storrow, the next day, lost no time in attempting to carry out his decision to see Torrie. Those attempts, however, were not altogether satisfactory. He telephoned twice to the huge apartment-hotel in which she was installed since her success, before being able to speak to her for a moment over the wire. Even then she seemed oddly hesitating and restrained, so much so, in fact, that Storrow finally concluded that she had been speaking with other persons undesirably close to her. But she made an appointment readily enough, suggesting the next afternoon, which was not a matinée-day, at four o'clock.

The next day at noon, however, a sedate-voiced woman who explained herself as Miss Throssel's private secretary called Storrow up on the telephone and requested that the appointment be postponed until Thursday at three, when Miss Throssel would be disengaged and very glad to see him.

It was Torrie herself who called up, when Thursday arrived, and asked him if he could conveniently make his call at five that afternoon instead of three. She was very, very busy, she explained in a hollow and somewhat listless tone over the wire, and she hoped the later hour would not be inconvenient for him. Storrow, as he hung up the receiver and went methodically on with his packing, solaced himself with the thought that she still remained in ignorance of his decision as to Krassler's action. And she would be less indifferent and less his enemy, he felt, when she knew the truth.

Yet that momentary depression of spirits returned to him when on Thursday afternoon he presented himself at Torrie's hotel and ran the gamut of door-man and

office-clerk and uniformed page and solemn-eyed secretary. Miss Throssel, it appeared, was dressing, but would be able to receive him in five minutes' time. It began to dawn on him, even before he entered the anteroom where a small and sinewy *masseuse* waited beside a shabby and patient-eyed lace-pedlar, that the nurturing currents of triumph were already causing Torrie to emerge from a mere person into a personage. He witnessed the delivery of a box of American Beauty roses, as long as a child's coffin, and beheld a capped and aproned maid lead a snapping King Charles spaniel out through the room where he waited. He heard the tinkle of a telephone-bell, followed by the carefully modulated voice of the bespectacled secretary. Then he caught the sound of Torrie's voice, in the room beyond the closed door, the once familiar voice with an altogether novel contralto lilt to it, even in its listlessness. Then the door opened and a brisk and blonde man with pale blue eyes and a bristling moustache stepped out. He carried a black bag in his hand, and in his movements was an odd mingling of the autocratic and the deferential. Storrow was inwardly debating whether he was a Swedish "rubber" or a Bavarian hair-dresser when the woman with the suppressed and secretarial manner announced that Miss Throssel was now at liberty.

Storrow, as he stepped through the opened door, found Torrie waiting for him.

She had apparently just slipped on a loose and flowing dressing-gown of unrelieved black. In it, as she stood confronting him from the centre of the room, she looked exceptionally tall, with an almost intimidating hint of the pontifical in her attitude. She was paler and thinner than usual, the tissue of the once milky skin having taken on a translucence which was new to it. Yet it was only her face, Storrow saw, which had lost its old-time contours, the throat and arms, for all their effect of bloodlessness, remained as round and firm

in line as ever. Her hair, he noticed as he stood there assailed by the mingled odours of benzoin and cut flowers and *peau de Espagne,* was much lighter than it had been. And as he stood there, trying to decipher why these outward alterations could produce the impression of a Torrie depersonalized and translated into a stranger, he found himself very unhappy and ill-at-ease. His reaction to that condition was a heavy effort at facetiousness.

"And who is the stately person in spectacles?" he inquired as the impersonal-eyed secretary quietly closed the door behind him. It was little more than an effort on his part, as perverse as it was forlorn, to brush aside the veils of formality that had been draped between them,— between them who had once been so intimate. But he could not help recalling, as the untimeliness of that query came home to him, what Charlotte Kirkner had once said about the big moments of life having the trick of taking on the aspects of littleness.

"That's my watch-dog," was Torrie's slowly intoned answer. Her face hardened a little and she forced herself to meet Storrow's frankly uncomprehending eyes. Then she shrugged a shoulder, with a diffidence which seemed new to her, as she moved across the room in her flowing black to speak for a moment into a telephone concealed in what looked like a doll's house of brocaded silk.

Storrow, as he waited, caught sight of the small figurine of *The Tired Model* on the far side of the room.

"I'm sorry I had to keep you waiting," he found Torrie saying to him. "But that was Schoenberg who just went out. And to get Schoenberg to work with you for an hour is like getting a visit from royalty."

Storrow was impressed, as she spoke, by the deeper and fuller timbre in her voice, as though the organ had taken on some new and unnatural power. He noticed, too, the elision of the "r's" in her speech, which left it more Anglicized, more formalized and full-throated. It

was the speech, he remembered, which tradition had always imposed upon the stage-star. And Torrie was now one of them.

"It doesn't matter in the least," he said, referring to his wait. "You're busy, of course, now you've got a success on your hands."

"But it's not a success, Owen," she said in a manner which reminded him that she was much the more self-possessed of the two. "*Smoke Signals* hasn't been a success."

"It seems to have the ear-marks of one," he unctuously contended. And again she shrugged her shoulder. It was a new trick of gesture that was exotic, unmistakably theatric. Storrow even wondered if it were something she had learned under the tutorship of Krassler. He stirred restlessly, with an involuntary movement of impatience.

"I wish I could ask you to smoke," she said in her mild and impersonal tones, noticing the movement. "But Krassler insists that it's bad for my throat."

"It would be, of course," acknowledged the other, without giving thought to what he was saying.

"There are so many things one has to be careful about, now," she told him, almost in a tone of complaint. But his mind was still on other days. It seemed odd that he should remember her as he had seen her once as he stood beside her bed. Her face had seemed slightly swollen, and her mouth was open as she breathed, so that he could see her tongue. A sour odour of wine had hung about that sleeping body, even as he had noticed the snow-white purity of the uncovered neck and breast. And now he tried to solace himself with the thought that she was at least escaping that sort of thing. Her drink, from this time forward, was to be the champagne of success. That would leave no call for other intoxicants.

"Krassler's been forcing the run of *Smoke Signals*," she was saying to him. "It was his star, you see, and

not his play that made the hit. So the play has got to go back to the warehouse, and I've got to go through that awful battle again."

"What battle?" asked Storrow, disturbed by the weariness in her voice.

"Why, this new production of mine that Krassler's working on. He's amazingly shrewd and clever at this sort of thing, Owen, so much cleverer than the outsider ever imagines! He prophesied exactly how *Smoke Signals* would go, and he made his plans accordingly. That's why he snapped up the American rights for *Clearance Papers* while the other New York managers were still waiting to see how it was going to go in London. He saw that *Smoke Signals* would do for a launching, but that it couldn't carry me far. With *Clearance Papers* it will be different. *That* will have to be a legitimate success. We'll have the London production to stand up against, and I'll have more of a straight part to make good in. And look at the size of it," she added as she crossed the room and took up a much soiled and thumbed and over-scrawled manuscript in its tattered blue cover. "Imagine merely having to memorize that number of sides! And besides all the work we're doing on *Clearance Papers,* rehearsing some days as much as seven hours at a time, we've got our eight performances every week of *Smoke Signals,* and all the other things that you simply can't escape." She stared with preoccupied eyes out of the rose-draped window, as she added: "It leaves so much depending on just one person!"

"So, after all, there's nothing really more enslaving than success!" he ventured as he grew into a realization that what he had foolishly interpreted as a spirit of tremendous reservation between them was actually a preoccupation with more imminent materialities.

She looked about at him, with a slow movement of the elaborately coiffured head, as though pricked by some muffled asperity in his words.

"Oh, no; everybody's awfully kind," she languidly acknowledged. "But I seem to be always tired, nowadays. I don't sleep the way I used to, and I so often get up tired in the morning. And every day there is that same awful grind. And I have to watch my health, of course, and take the very best care of my throat, and find time, in some way, for an hour's sleep every evening before I go on, and"—

She was interrupted by the muffled shrill of her telephone-bell. Storrow noticed her sigh as she reached for the instrument and answered the call. Then she sat staring ahead of her, for an abstracted moment or two.

"No," she repeated, "they are all very kind and good. But I always seem to be tired. And I feel sometimes, that I'm nothing but a machine, a machine that belongs to other people and must never be allowed to get dusty, or out of order, or lie idle, no matter how creaky the machine may feel in some of its joints. And sometimes, when I'm left alone with nothing to think about, it seems almost foolish. But when I'm back at the theatre, with my make-up finished and my first-act gown on, and I hear the orchestra and the opening lines and get a glimpse from the wings of that big audience waiting — waiting for me, Owen, for *me,* I forget all the rest. And all I remember is that I'm going to hold that audience, and make it laugh and cry and acknowledge my power over it. And that somehow seems to make up for all the rest."

Storrow, as he heard her, remembered what Pannie Atwill had already said to him. And he began to see, as Torrie sat explaining in detail to him just how Krassler wanted her to handle her rôle in *Clearance Papers,* that she was indeed lost, not only to him, but to the rest of the world. She was lost to that world, he felt, in spite of the fact that she had given herself to it. She impressed him as a woman about to be sacrificed to some pagan and unappeased idol. So engrossed was she in that hieratic immolation that it suddenly impressed him

as foolish even to recall the purpose which had brought him into her presence. It would be kinder, he told himself, to leave unsaid what he had intended to say. And he was not sorry when the lady with the secretarial air tapped lightly but determinedly on the outer door.

"You see," Torrie said with a resentful head-movement towards that door, "I can't even have ten minutes to myself!"

He took his departure, disturbed by a confusion of impressions. The most prominent of these was the remembered coolness of her fingers as he shook hands with her and the awkwardness of his own tongue as he attempted to wish her unqualified success in her work. He went away wretched, with an indeterminate desolation eating at his heart, yet at the same time and in some mysterious manner more satisfied in mind, as though that visit, for all that it had left unsaid on his part, had given a sense of completion to what might otherwise have retained a disturbing air of being unfinished.

Two hours later he succeeded in getting in touch with Herman Krassler over the telephone. He explained that he was no longer in a position to oppose any action which his wife might take towards obtaining her freedom, and that Krassler could act accordingly. The latter coolly, and with no slightest trace of triumph in his voice, announced that this course was undoubtedly the best for all concerned.

Two days later, as Storrow was packing the last of his belongings in the last of his trunks, he was summoned to the door of his denuded studio by a sedentary and chlorotic-looking clerk from an attorney's office, who thrust into his hand a document of undoubted legal aspect.

"You're Owen Storrow, aren't you?" asked the emissary of the law.

And Storrow, in acknowledging that he was, knew that he had duly and formally accepted service in his wife's impending action for an absolute divorce.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

SPRING comes tardily but none the less beautifully to that country which may be said to lie in the lap of the Great Lakes. It comes with a sense of release after imprisonment, of abandonment after restraint, of tenderness after tempest. It comes with a more riotous surrender of bud and leaf and blossom, a more rhapsodic outburst from April's innumerable choiring throats, a more impassioned craving for loveliness in every azure-mirroring runnel and trillium-starred valley and robin-haunted hillside. It comes over lake and field and pine land and burgeoning orchard with the breath of a thousand strange odours, as silvery sweet as wind-blown bugles, transforming umber into emerald, awakening magically into life that Sleeping Beauty known as Earth and arraying her in a radiance so etherealized that man, beholding it, finds his vernal gladness in some way shot through with sadness and the immemorial rapture of living in some way touched with tears.

Storrow, once more installed at Pine-Brae, beheld this return of Spring to his native land, and beheld it with a confusion of feelings. He was not altogether happy, and he was not altogether unhappy. Periods of vague restlessness seemed to alternate with periods of contentment equally indeterminate. But he remained, on the whole, in a neutral zone of toleration touched with expectancy, as though somewhere and at some unlooked-for time the even tenor of his life might snap off into tumult, tumult like that of a white-watering rapid snatching the sluggishness out of a river. He was oppressed at times with a feeling of convalescence, as though he were emerg-

ing from a long and weakening illness which had sapped his power of reacting to things. He nursed, in his more self-conscious moments, an impression of being older than he ought to have been, with an invalid-like detachment from activities and influences that should have meant so much to him.

But the colouring of life, outside this persistent apathy which he soon saw it would be useless to combat, was not unpleasurable and not untouched with its satisfactions. He even discovered, as he found himself more and more involved in the reconstruction of a property too long neglected, that daily toil and material distractions could medicine those teasing and less tangible susceptibilities of the spirit, so that as Spring advanced his interest in the work about Pine-Brae became both more engrossing and more personal. It brought, however, a new clearness to his eye, a deepened colour to his lean cheek, an old-time hardening of hand and limb-muscles. Sometimes, indeed, after a full day of labour in open sunlight and ozonic northern air, he seemed narcotized into an indifferency that stood side by side with contentment and reached out a russet hand to well-being.

But the one thing that weighed on him, during those earlier weeks at Pine-Brae, was his loneliness. He had declined to reinstate Uncle Abe in his old-time position of housekeeper, preferring that all ties with the past should be kept as tenuous as possible. Even as things were, that past had the habit of cropping unexpectedly out, with a geologic sort of remoteness, as it did when he found one of his wife's hat-pins stuck in the back of the old oak mantel-piece, and still again when he stumbled on what remained of one of Torrie's inadequate little flower-beds with its scattering of fern-roots and wood-violets which she had so carefully yet so childishly transplanted.

He had difficulty, in fact, in finding a suitable housekeeper. For the first two months, indeed, he had en-

dured an old Englishman and his wife, each equally addicted to the use of gin and each equally capable, when under its influence, of prolonged and noisy combat. The cooking was far from acceptable, the disorder of the house increased, and the projected work on orchards and buildings and line-fences fell far behind schedule. Then came an orgy and battle too open to be condoned. After dismissing the still gin-soaked combatants from Pine-Brae, Storrow lived quite alone for a few weeks. But this effort at "batching it," as the vernacular of the countryside phrased such experiences, proved neither desirable nor profitable. When a neighbour told Storrow of an orphan-girl "up the Lake" whose mother and father had been drowned crossing the ice to Pelee Island, he journeyed to the farmer who was giving the unfortunate girl temporary harbourage, in the hope that she might be suitable as a housekeeper. When he learned that she was still a mere girl of twenty, however, he was disposed to let the matter drop. But her temporary guardian entertained no such qualms.

"She's a good girl, is Crystal Cantwell," the younger man was assured, "a girl who's always kept to herself, sir, with no nonsense about men-folks. She's quiet-tongued, sir, and as willin' a worker as you'd wish, and not the kind to be botherin' a young gentleman who's not disposed to be botherin' with her!"

Storrow, as he waited while the girl was being summoned into his presence, seemed to find the room touched, not so much with the atmosphere of the slave-market, but more with the calloused and careless materialities of the stock-yard. And this impression was in no way diminished when Crystal stepped silent and embarrassed through the door. She stood, after one quick and comprehensive glance at him, with her eyes fixed on the floor, blushing rose-red as Storrow reiterated his doubts as to the expediency of a woman so young assuming control of his household.

"That woman, sir, is one in a hundred," proclaimed the Legree of the invisible auction-block. And still again the younger man studied the girl with the waves of rose-colour suffusing her slightly averted face. The first impression she gave him was one of heaviness, of rustic timidity. The exposed skin of her neck and arms was a butternut brown, and the mouth was undeniably large, just as the lips carried a line of undeniable sensitiveness. It was only her hair and her eyes, at that first inspection, which seemed attractive to him. Her hair, bleached by the open sun from a hazel-nut hue to almost the tint of Roman gold, gave him the impression of something tawny and untamed, with a look of desert vastnesses in her face. And the eyes themselves were large and limpid, a clouded grey-blue that showed violet in a strong side-light. They had the trick of taking on a look of pathos as she fixed her gaze on any one object, a look of wistfulness which might have been termed beautiful if it had appeared more consciously alert. Her russet neck was full and round and unlined, with more a suggestion of columnar strength than of softness. Her hands, too, were large, but startlingly well-shaped and suggestive of secret refinements and secret capabilities. It was the black fringe of lashes, Storrow's trained vision promptly noted, which made her eyes look darker than they really were. He noticed, as he questioned her, that she did not speak quickly, and assumed that things would seldom stir her acutely. Yet she carried an odd impression of capacity for feeling, of emotions carefully herded and corralled. And as her shyness vanished and the blood-waves returned less frequently to the dusky pigment of the cheek he found his earlier misgivings slipping away from him. She herself, he felt, was answer enough to those misgivings.

So the bargain was struck, and two days later Crystal Cantwell and her cow-hide trunk tied with rope arrived at Pine-Brae.

With her advent came a change to the neglected and musty-aired house in the midst of its whispering pine groves. Chaos in some way became comfort. Even solitude became less oppressive. The new maid set to work with a peasant-like inarticulateness, agreeing to anything which Storrow, as her master, might suggest, with her large and limpid eyes resting abstractedly on his face as he talked to her. They were not stupid eyes, he was beginning to see, and what he had first thought of as their bovine placidity seemed more the serenity of a soul incorruptibly at peace with itself. Sometimes, too, the modelling of her bared arm, of her uncovered neck or shoulder, startled him into a momentary admiration. As she went on with her countless household tasks, without comment or complaint, he began to respect her capacity for silence. She seldom smiled, it was true, but on those rare occasions when the slow red lips did relax, there was a quiet warmth to the smile which seemed to atone for its tardiness. Yet this spirit of reluctant mirth seldom extended to her eyes, which were habitually mournful. When she sat, she usually stooped forward a little, and if her slowness of movement, when not at work, impressed Storrow as swan-like, the absence of easy grace from those movements made him think, not of a swan floating along tranquil surfaces, but of one that had ventured on land and was moving a little wistfully towards some lost and more natural element. What puzzled him most, perhaps, was her air of sky-line spaciousness when in the open. There she had the trick of falling into unconsidered poses and positions which came to him with the seal of the immemorial on them, impressing him as instinctively true and poignant and universal.

But all the while, as Spring merged into Summer and Summer brought its promise of fulfilments, she went about her tasks apparently fortified by some large and secret knowledge. Just what it was, Storrow could not guess. He was able to talk to her with less restraint as

he became more accustomed to her presence there. But she was never the one to begin these talks. She listened patiently, with her limpid eyes always on his face. In time, she even added a ribbon to her hair and fell to consulting the mail-order catalogues on the matter of emollients and underwear. In hot weather she would unbutton her shirt-waist and roll down the loose collar, exposing a whiter fulness of throat and shoulder. Storrow caught himself, at different times, studying the mild roundness of that full throat, with a feeling as remote and yet as disturbing as the beat of nocturnal tom-toms to the children of the children of the jungle. The girl would go on with her work, giving no sign of her knowledge that she was being covertly watched. And Storrow would suddenly remember uncompleted labours in field and orchard and packing-shed, for the task of transforming Pine-Brae into the order and beauty which he more and more wished for it was not one calling for idleness.

The summer-end, indeed, brought a stress of labour that proved a tax on the time of both master and maid, for the position of master and maid had been preserved between them. She had eaten only after he had left the table, though once or twice he had returned and seated himself opposite her, to clear up more fully some point about the household or the farm-work. Then came the day, when the season of small fruits was at its height, when he announced that the old arrangements about meals was a waste of time and labour. From then on, he told her, it would be better for them to have their meals together. And from then on, too, he fell into the habit of addressing her as "Crystal."

So Crystal, instead of waiting until he had finished, quietly took her place opposite him. Storrow found that change both so pleasant and so convenient that it struck him as foolish in being so late in suggesting itself. Yet more than ever that companion confronting him across their small island of snow-white linen seemed fortified

by some large and secret knowledge which he could neither name nor understand. Her limpid eyes carried no look of elation, but there were times when some elusive note in her bearing implied that she had won a victory. She became more fastidious in her dress, more studious in the manner in which she did up her heavy braids of hair. She even asked for books to read in the evening when her work was done, books which he considered "improving." Once or twice he made an effort to describe to her what his life in New York had been like, with a momentary wistful desire to revive memories which were becoming disconcertingly phantasmal. But imagination and curiosity alike seemed unable to bridge, with her, the interstellar immensities between Pine-Brae and that far-off city on its triangular island of unrest. And finding that his intentions led only to a mutual depression, Storrow made no effort to repeat them.

One night, on coming in for his evening meal, leg-weary and rubicund and placid-minded from his long hours of labour in the open air, he found Crystal in difficulties. She had cut a gash in her hand while trying to open a glass sealer of fruit, and when he first caught sight of her she was struggling, none too successfully, to tie a strip of cotton over the wound. He stopped and stared at her as she held one end of the cotton-strip between her strong white teeth and with her free hand attempted to draw the knot tight.

"Hadn't I better do that for you?" he suggested.

"I think I can manage it," she said, without looking up at him. He laughed, and an answering smile came to her grave face, at her lack of success.

"We've got to have a neater job than that," he said as he placed a chair for her and she sank obediently into it.

Then he took the wounded hand in his own and inspected the cut. It was neither deep nor disturbing, but Storrow bent over it abstractedly, arrested by the rich

scarlet of the blood which oozed slow drop by drop from the short wound. It impressed him as the flaunting crimson banner of bodily vigour and health, as an advertisement of some superb animal vitality which had hitherto escaped his attention. And as he carefully rewrapped the hurt hand he found a sudden satisfaction in the nearness of her breathing body to his own. He turned away hurriedly, in fact, as soon as the knot had been tied in the strip of red-stained cotton, disquieted by a reaction which could come with so little warning. For at that accidental contact of flesh with flesh he had felt in his blood, remote and mysterious, the beating of ancestral tom-toms. He became suddenly aware of a precipice, a precipice which skirted disturbingly close to the path he had been following.

As they ate their meal together that night Storrow found his mind dwelling more actively on the loneliness which engulfed them, on their remoteness from the outer world and its interests. As he stared across the table at the woman confronting him he saw that her colour was higher than usual. Her eyes, too, seemed unwilling to meet his, and the silence that fell on the room became electric, alarming.

He sat watching the rise and fall of the faded but freshly ironed pink shirtwaist which covered her bosom. He watched it for a long time. Then he slowly rose from his chair, crossed to her side of the table, and stood beside her.

She neither glanced up nor moved as he rested one hand on her heavily plaited hair. With his other hand he slowly lifted her chin and stared into her face. There was no look of wonder in her eyes. She neither moved nor spoke. And the next moment, stooping lower, he kissed her.

Why he did so, he scarcely knew. Instinct told him that it was inexpedient. After-thought warned him, even as he felt the vital warmth of the full red lips, that the

movement was in the nature of a compromise, a capitulation to a wayward and momentary impulse. But the scar of some old wound ached in his heart. He felt alone in the world, as alone in the world as he knew the woman at his side to be. Life, he felt, still owed him something, though he was unable to define the nature of that debt. Yet the thing was all wrong, he reiterated as his thoughts went back to other and earlier days. And the memory of those days caused him suddenly to feel sorry for the limpid-eyed woman whose hand he still abstractedly held in his. He had remembered how little it was he could ever give her; the husks and ashes of his wasted youth, the remnants of a life worn shoddy and thin. His spirit had been left dry, he told himself, even though his veins could still sing with the wayward blood of man's desire.

As he stared down at the girl's hand, roughened by wind and water, hardened and calloused by toil, it struck him as equally tragic that she might demand nothing more of him than this same remnant of a wasted life, that she might stand ready to be doubly cheated, by herself as well as by him. And that filled him with a vague pity which prompted him for a moment to cover that thrice pitiful hand with his own, almost protectingly, before he turned and walked out of the room, without a spoken word.

But the ice had been broken. The silent compact of intimacy had been established. It was only too easy, when they sat alone and idle again, for him to reach over and draw her passive head down against his shoulder. When he kissed her, this time, he did so with less hesitation and less self-torturing exhumation of memories. It was less impersonal, that kiss, and less meditative. Yet even then, and still later when he kissed her still more impetuously and more frequently, he felt sorry for her. He was haunted by the impression that he was doing her a vast injustice. But their meals, as they sat one on

each side of the scrupulously white-covered table, became more animated with talk. Through the lengthening autumn evenings he fell into the habit of reading aloud to her as she sewed beside him. And in that companionship he found a completeness which was even disturbing, hinting as it did at the immaterial masonries of self-sufficiency which were slowly and insidiously immuring them from the rest of the world.

The completeness of that divorce came unexpectedly home to him when the mail brought to Pine-Brae the heavily embossed announcement of Charlotte Kirkner's marriage to Chester Hardy. Along with it came a letter from Charlotte herself, a brief but blithe letter telling him they were off to Capri for the winter and that if Owen would meet them in Naples about the end of March they could all have a wonderful Easter together in Rome.

"You've had bad news," said the red-handed girl who had paused for the second time, in her task of clearing away the supper dishes, to glance at Storrow as he sat before the fire turning this letter over and over in his hand.

"Two old friends of mine have been married," he said as he realized the uselessness of going into further explanations. But he was able to laugh a little. "And you wouldn't call that bad news, would you, Crystal; a man marrying the woman he loves?"

She looked at him with solemn eyes.

"Not if the woman loves him back," she said as she piled dish after dish on her round black tray. And the unconsidered sagacity of that statement did not come home to him until he had lighted his lantern and trudged out to the stables to make sure his stock was all safe and sound for the night.

It was not, indeed, until the end of a winter which had proved strangely mild for the Lake region that anything occurred to disrupt the quiet flow of the uncounted days. Storrow noticed, one crisp March morning of inter-

mingled frost and sunlight which had sent him in to breakfast with tingling body and momentarily elated spirits, that Crystal's face as she poured his coffee was both clouded and colourless.

"Aren't you feeling well?" he asked as he took the steaming cup from her hand.

"I'm frightened," she said, avoiding his eyes.

"Frightened?" he repeated, disturbed by the pathos in her downcast face. "What are you frightened about?"

"About something that's happened," she finally acknowledged.

"What is it?" he asked, still at sea.

"It's something we should have thought about, in time," she said as she compelled her gaze to meet his. And she knew, the next moment, that he finally understood.

He found himself accepting, without any positive reaction, a truth which should have been not only disturbing but alarming. That she herself should have accepted it calmly, as the women of her race had doubtlessly accepted it for ages back, did not impress him as unusual. But he remained puzzled by the discovery that he himself was not as deeply stirred as he ought to have been. In one way, indeed, he stood not ungrateful for this new contingency which had been thrust upon him, since it carried a promise of giving selvage to the fabric of existence, direction and purpose to what had hitherto been merely drifting.

They were married promptly and without ceremony by the Baptist minister of a neighbouring town. Storrow, who had encountered a number of small but irritating obstacles in obtaining a license, since the Dominion in which he resided seemed disposed to ignore the legal status of a foreign divorce decree, did not take his hollow-chested reverend friend into his confidence with regard to that earlier marriage, though he made the fee as substantial as his purse would allow.

Out of the happenings of that day Storrow remembered the threadbare parsonage parlour with its worn plush furniture, the pinched and plaintive face of the clergyman mumbling so hurriedly through the abbreviated ritual, the imperturbable quiet dignity of the girl who hung on his arm, the peering faces of children, apparently as thick as rabbits in a warren, and the tired voice of a woman speaking beyond a closed door and repeating her warning of "Don't feed the gold-fish, dearie!" He remembered the cool and thoughtful eyes of his wife as they drove home side by side, and he remembered another ceremony of the same nature, in an unspeakably disordered and stuffy office which had smelt of tobacco-smoke and mouldy books. But he was stirred and disturbed less by the memory than the atmosphere of mustiness and forlorn emptiness which hung about it. Time, he began to see, was working its purpose, Time the avenger, Time the healer.

His wife, as the quiet tenor of life was resumed at Pine-Brae, did not seem to ask for any added intimacy. They soon took up the old routine again, and fell back into the old ways. But there was a difference. Inconspicuous filaments of feeling and association were day by day thrown out; subliminal ties more and more asserted themselves; more ponderable and at the same time more imprisoning became the obligations to a newer and unlooked for life. If Storrow struggled at all against this sense of impending anchorage, of ineluctable rootage, his struggle was both a secret and an ineffectual one. Yet as Spring came once more to the lap of the Great Lakes he found himself possessed by an unreasoning and slowly increasing unrest. He explained to Crystal that there were business reasons why he should go to New York for a week.

To this she offered no trace of objection. She surprised him, indeed, by saying the change would do him good, and crowned him with a vague misery by the

meticulous care with which she made ready and packed the things he would need for the journey.

"If I never come back," he said, laughing to dissemble the vague homelessness that gnawed at his heart, as he said good-bye to her, "you'll see that Lady Dorcas doesn't eat that second setting of eggs, won't you?"

"You'll come back," quietly responded his wife, with her cool and limpid eyes resting for a moment on his face, where, for some unaccountable reason, the colour slowly mounted and receded.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

STORROW, as his train came to a stop beneath the arches of the New York viaduct, was troubled by a world-strangeness which tended to chill and cramp his soul. The spectacle of countless thousands, intent on their own ends, still again impressed him with his insignificance, reviving the thought that he was nothing more than an infinitesimal atom in that whirling maelstrom of life. He found himself surrounded by fellow-travellers immured in their own interests, hurrying on, with an empty-eyed preoccupation peculiar to city throngs, to their unknown tasks and destinations. He stared into flat-windows and caught glimpses of life, bald life in crowded and sordid hives, incredibly close at hand and at the same time incredibly remote from him. He emerged into a world of colour, of hurried intentness touched with lightheartedness, of grinding wheels and processional street-crowds, of uncomprehended panoramic movements about gay-windowed shop-fronts, of dizzy iron structures concealing their gaunt limbs under casings of stone as white as ivory, of clean-swept morning avenues with an old-world quietness still on them and the huddled centuries confounded by those tip-tilted streets known as skyscrapers within a stone's throw of a *chalet* from France and a Roman *palazzio* and a Greek temple of books, pallid-walled and pagan-simple, that might have survived through the cool and quiet of time from the day of Eratosthenes.

It was a mellower and a more pictorial world, Storrow found, a world which was not slow to weave about him its old allurement at the same time that he awakened to

his increasing estrangement from it. He was coming back to it, he saw, as a traveller visits a foreign country, unengulfed by its anæsthetizing tides of action, sensitized, because of his very aloofness, to that glamour which attaches to any *terra incognita,* yet vaguely wistful for some accidental tie to renew his relationship with his own kind. For, even in a year or two, Time, in that city of change, had wrought its changes. And as though in sympathy with his own secret emotions, that April morning was slowly overcast with clouds blown in from the sea, the shadows in the narrow street-canyons became less defined, traffic-policemen and taxi-drivers appeared in tarpaulins, and by noon the city had settled down to a half-day of warm but steady Spring rain. . . .

It was late in the afternoon when a dripping taxi-cab, with the tire-chains slapping its rear fenders, turned from the deserted east side of Madison Square into Twenty-Fourth Street and drew up at the curb before an old red-brick studio building. The passenger in the grey raincoat stepped out of the taxi, paid his fare, and watched that vehicle as it went slapping off again through the steady torrent that seemed to have washed clean the very bones of the city. Then he looked briefly but thoughtfully up at the red-brick house-front, surprised at the sense of contraction that reigned there, as though the walls in front of him had shrunk and withered and roughened like the skin of a winter apple. He hesitated for a moment as he stepped in through the gloomy doorway, and hesitated still again to sniff the assailing odours as he slowly mounted the stairs.

When he came to the top floor he stopped, leaning abstractedly against the worn balustrade and staring along the half-lighted hallway. Then he advanced slowly towards the second door on the left where, hearing the sound of music, he stood with knitted brows, listening. It was a piano that he heard, played half idly as a woman's voice hummed the air, at times scarcely audible.

But he knew that it was the "Kennst du Das Land?" song from *Mignon,* and he continued to listen, more to the notes than to the humming voice, with a sudden and uncontrolled constriction of the throat.

After the last chord had died away he continued to stand there with one hand against the shabby door-frame. But he took a deep breath as he finally raised this hand and tapped on the faded panel.

There was a wait of several moments. He was on the point of repeating the knock, in fact, when the door was opened by a surprisingly young but sedentary-looking woman with bobbed hair. She wore a smudged painter's smock on which a small bunch of violets held together with tin-foil seemed to have been freshly pinned. And her own almost colourless face, still unlined and round with youth, seemed to echo in its shadows the violet-blue colour-tones from the little nose-gay that rose and fell with the breathing of her round young breast.

The stranger in the doorway, for a moment, seemed to experience some difficulty in explaining himself.

"I wonder," he finally ventured, "if I might have a look at this studio of yours?"

The girl with the bobbed hair seemed unable to understand him. Yet a more pointed inspection of his figure assured her he was something more than a mere street-beggar. And the Prussian-blue eye with the animal-like glow in it impressed her as an amazingly gentle eye, as an eye to remember, and, if she could get rid of the slight haggardness which gave it an untimely impression of age, as an eye which she would some day like to paint.

"I'm afraid I'm interrupting you," the stranger was saying. "But the truth of the matter is, this room was once — I mean that I myself lived here once, and"—

"That must have been some time ago," interrupted the girl with the bobbed hair, almost sceptically. And her visitor remembered that, as time was reckoned in her city of unrest and change, it was a very long time ago.

He moved his head slowly up and down, in assent. Then the young woman, as she swung the door wider, laughed awkwardly, apparently infected by the awkwardness of her visitor. It was then and only then that this visitor caught sight of the long-haired young man seated on the piano-bench, with his back to them. His position there implied suspended action, patient withdrawal from a colloquy in which he could have no interest, and served to increase the embarrassment of the sober-eyed intruder who stood peering about into the shadowy corners of an all too familiar chamber.

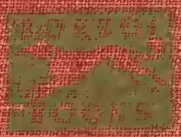
"I'm afraid it's not very tidy," ventured its new proprietor as she followed that slow-moving stare about the room. "And I suppose this old skylight leaked in your day, just as it does in mine?"

But that question, if it was meant for a question, remained unanswered. The quiet-eyed man seemed still intent on his inspection of the studio, wall by wall and point by point. Between the two big windows, where his *Sentinel Wolf* had once stood, were pinned an array of girls' heads in sepia, all amazingly alike, all amazingly doll-like in their dehumanizing prettiness. Some of them, he remembered, he had seen on magazine-covers, but he gave them little time or thought, for they were not to be reckoned among the links which were leading him back to the past. Yet many other trivial details of the room, as the rain continued to beat on roof and skylight with an immeasurably sorrowful sound, he drank in hungrily and with an increasing look of abstraction in his eyes. For it seemed a very long time ago, now, since this was his home. And as he continued to stand there, communing with his memories, confronting the days of his dead past, the youth with the averted face reached up to the piano-top for a small stringed instrument known as a ukelele, and sounded a not insignificant chord or two on its wires. The woman in the smock also moved half impatiently to one of the windows,

against which the rain was beating quietly and steadily.

Her visitor's rough face, which seemed to have lost its earlier russet tone, coloured slightly with embarrassment. He murmured something about being very sorry, and also being grateful, and turned and walked slowly towards the door.

Yet when he had passed out through that door he turned and looked back again. He did so without seeming to be conscious of the girl who had resumed her position at the keyboard, while the youth with the ukelele stood close beside her. He heard, yet did not hear, the concerted chords which the two instruments threw out across the quiet shadows, for at the moment he was consorting with the kindly ghosts of other days. And as he saw the youth with the ukelele lean closer over the girl on the piano-bench it came poignantly home to him how he himself was merely an atom in the infinite currents of Time, a moment's whisper in the vast and inexplicable chorus of life. The dimly-lighted room with its shadows and disorder, its faded furniture and its time-yellowed walls from which the shallow sepia faces smiled so mockingly, took on a ghostly aspect as he stared at it. Yet its very drabness seemed for a moment to stand touched with glamour, enriched with irrecoverable memories. They were not happy memories, a great many of them. But Time, in some way, was striving to redeem them, to heal them of their uglinesses. In that room, he felt, the best of his life lay sealed and coffined. It held his past, his dead past, that could never again know wonder and rapture and youth.

He turned away and went slowly down the familiar worn treads of the stairs, feeling old and neutral, with abstraction in his eyes and a dull ache in his heart. He stepped out into the grey light of the late afternoon weighed down by a vague regret for his wasted life. He wondered if it might have been different, if only he had awakened earlier to his power of directing it differently.

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